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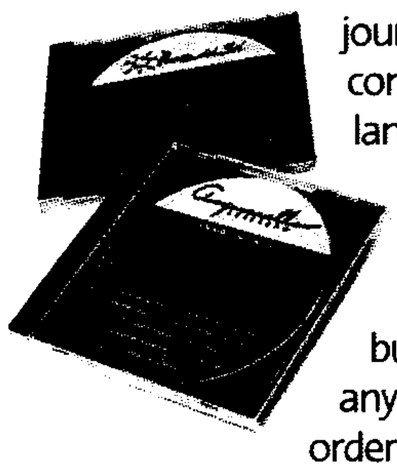

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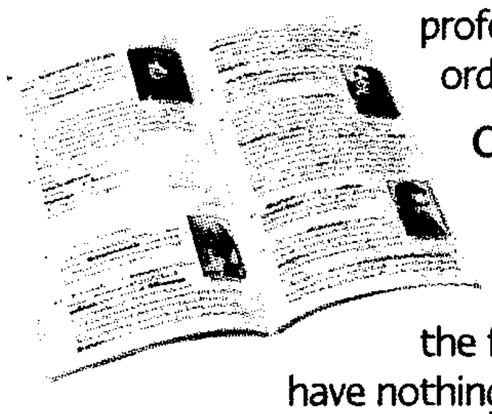

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E. Strobes
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SUBSCRIPTION RATES
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ADVERTISING
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Published by Pressdram Ltd, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. **Printed** by BGP Ltd, Bicester OX6 7QZ. **Distributed** by P.E. Distributions, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. 020 7437 4017.

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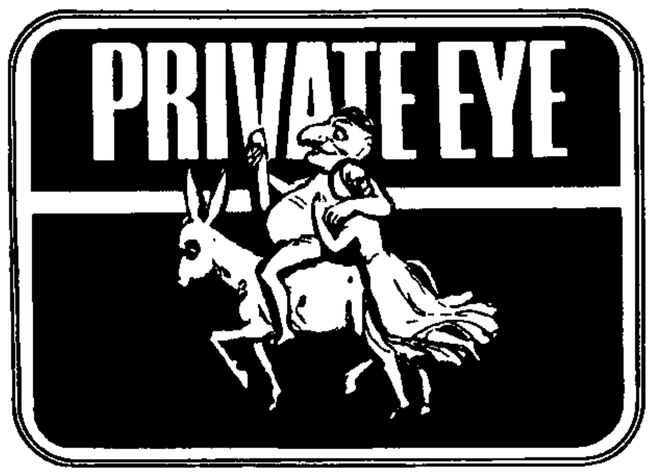

Just war...

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IN THE TEAROOM

AS MPs go off on their half-term break and the Iraq situation nears its end game, ministers' thoughts quite naturally turn to a spring reshuffle. They all know that the way the cards will fall depends on two things: how convincingly they perform in this week's loyalty test; and, in the longer run, a low-ish bodycount in Baghdad.

John Prescott lost no time signing-up for what Tony Blair hopes will be a "moral majority" for ousting Saddam. The deputy prime minister was looking well overdue for the chop and his deft characterization of war against dictators as one of the most noble and long standing traditions of "this great movement of ours" may well have saved his bacon.

Party chairman John Reid has also come out 1,000 percent loyal and is now set to enjoy most favoured colleague status from a grateful Downing Street. Luckily for Reid, he was able to get his message of unqualified support out to the media even before the ever-obliging health secretary Alan Milburn managed to barge his way to a microphone.

But top marks for political acuity must surely go to Margaret Beckett, who has brilliantly discounted Labour's forthcoming pisspoor performance in the May's local government elections by predicting that the peaceniks and wobblies will probably stay at home. She surely deserves to keep her precarious place at environment and rural affairs.

These ministers have calculated that all the loose talk about Blair doing a Ramsay Macdonald and forming a national government with IDS and the Mark Oaten wing of the Lib Dems is pretty far-fetched. Almost as far-fetched, indeed, as the prospect of a lefty coup of the sort Tariq Ali called for in Hyde Park last Saturday. Despite the rhetoric, hardly anyone really foresees George Galloway becoming foreign secretary or Alice Mahon being installed in No 10.

All eyes then will be on the known "dodgies": Clare Short and Robin Cook. But that's a mistake, because they don't really matter any more. Whenever the question is raised in Downing Street which way this pair will jump, it's met with a chorus of "Que sera, sera". All eyes should instead be on the bellwether ministers – the talented and up-and-coming: Welsh secretary Peter Hain; Europe minister Denis McShane; education secretary Charles Clarke. If one or more of them even begins to hint they're seriously contemplating a post-Blair future, then either Downing Street really will have a problem, or the offending minister will have to be very publicly fired *pour encourager les autres*.

'Urquhart'

LUVVIES

"We are two people who, despite our celebrity, have remained very simple, very honest and very considerate of others.

"We care about the human race. We care about the world."

CATHERINE ZETA-JONES
The Mail

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Court Circular

THE QUEEN has rebuffed a suggestion from Tony Blair that she might like to help out her old mate with a few well-chosen words in support of war on Iraq.

Sir Robin Janvrin, her private secretary, gave Downing Street spinners short shrift when they approached the palace days before the great march. Janvrin said Brenda would be happy to make a short broadcast to the nation once British troops were at war, but there was no precedent for such a thing before hostilities commenced. And although the Queen has a number of speeches planned, Janvrin advised ministers against trying to hijack any of them for what might be construed as propaganda purposes.

After being rebuffed by Brenda, Downing Street turned to Prince Charles. His private secretary, Sir Michael Peat, sounded out his master – and quickly concluded that the philosopher prince agonising about war and peace wouldn't go down too well. War – you know, it really is appalling…

'Flunkey'

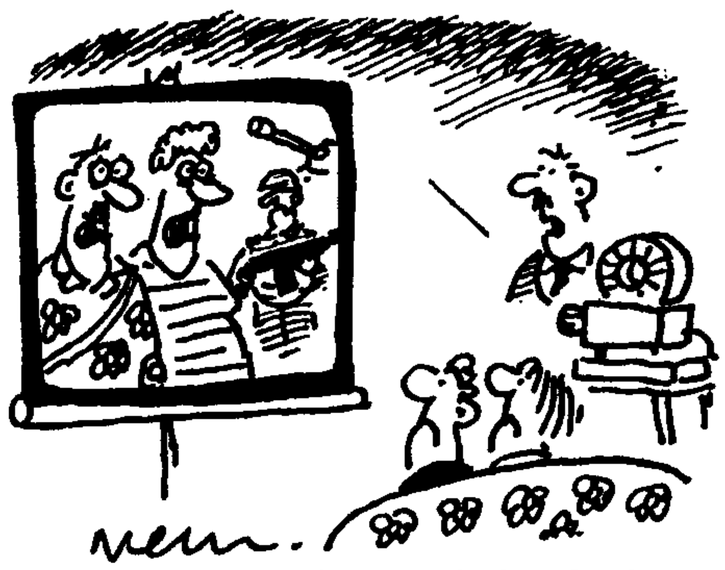
SPECTACULAR bad luck for estate agents DTZ, which is marketing office space in Heathrow's air traffic control tower.

Flogging off rooms in the building on behalf of National Air Traffic Control Services, DTZ sent out hundreds of expensive glossy folders to business this month, pointing out the "uniqueness" of the location at the heart of one of the world's busiest airports.

Anyone arriving to view the potential office space last week was greeted by the off-putting site of troops and tanks on the look out for the latest mystery terrorist threat. The marketing material trumpets that "each room is secure" – but would-be renters are now likely to have other security issues in mind.

The Bush administration plan to immunize 450,000 health care workers against smallpox is getting underway, despite spotty resistance from hospitals and some members of Congress.

USA Today



"Here's one of us terrified to death at Heathrow..."

Street Of Shame

WHEN troops were sent to Heathrow airport in their armoured cars last week, cynical lobby hacks immediately accused the prime minister of a propaganda exercise to boost the war effort.

Oddly enough, these serious accusations didn't appear in their newspapers for a full two days. And when they did, they only related to junior ministers like John Reid, the Labour party chairman, and not to the prime minister himself.

Reid was reportedly "rattled" when forced to deny that the airport troops were a propaganda stunt, which was sometimes softened to "a PR exercise". So, while lobby journalists were happy to throw the propaganda accusation at Tony himself (via his official spokesman), it seems courageous editors are more comfortable levelling the same accusation only at much smaller government fish.

REBEKAH WADE made her name as editor of the *News of the Screws* by printing the names and addresses of dozens of alleged paedophiles. Given the general intelligence quotient of *Screws* readers, the consequence could have been predicted by anyone (except the lovely Rebekah): many other citizens who had vaguely similar names or addresses were driven out of their houses by howling lynch-mobs.

Has Rebekah learned anything from the fiasco? Apparently not. Two weeks ago she published the mobile phone number of notorious Muslim cleric Abu Hamza in the *Sun* and urged her readers to give him a piece of their minds.

Alas, as everyone knows, the minds in question are not all as sharp as Rebekah's. Gareth Pointon, a 24-year-old from Newport, Gwent, received his first death threat at 6.30am on the morning the *Sun* printed Hamza's number – which is one digit different from Pointon's.

"I didn't know what was going on," he told his local paper. "At first I was really scared because when I got up I got this phone call from this geezer who was calling me all sorts and telling me he was going to kill me." Over the next five hours Pointon was bombarded with 200 calls from Wade's moronic readers threatening to shoot him, stab him or blow him up if he didn't leave the country at once.

The *Sun*'s objection to Abu Hamza, of course, is that he's a dangerous fanatic whose inflammatory remarks incite hatred and violence. Takes one to know one, eh, Rebekah?

"NOBODY loathes child sex offenders more than this newspaper," said a leading article in the *News of the Screws* on 9 February, reassuring readers that it wasn't about to go soft on perverts now that crusading Rebekah Wade had left the paper.

Shame, then, that a mere three pages earlier, the *Screws* carried "playful" pictures of "pop sensations Tatu" who happily exploit images of youthful lesbian sex. *Screws* readers were promised a forthcoming bathtub adventure with one of them: "The scene's so hot she had to warn her mum." Meanwhile Tatu's sleazy manager found time to break off from banking the *Screws'* cheque to admit to the *Sun*: "I prefer underage girls."

THE London *Evening Standard* has played a cruel trick on those trusting readers who rely on it for personal finance tips: the newspaper's business section has invited former gossip columnist Christopher "the Spiv" Silvester to dispense advice on money-management.

In a two-page feature on 7 February he urged readers to follow his example by "investing in fine wines through a company that offers a managed portfolio service".

Incredibly, the *Standard* billed the Spiv as an "expert". As many old colleagues know to their cost, however, his greatest expertise is in cadging (and losing) money. Heeding Silvester's advice on where to put one's life savings is about as sensible as learning English from John Prescott.

"No, children. Just because Mummy has Daddy's picture on her kick bag doesn't mean she doesn't love him anymore"

Number crunching

7,000

■ column inches in national press predicting jams and chaos on first morning of London congestion charge

0

■ actual miles of jams and chaos on first morning of London congestion charge

WHEN the *Daily Telegraph* first heard about the Columbia shuttle disaster it realised a heavyweight columnist was needed to make sense of the tragedy.

It called on the eminent Canadian journalist – and wife of *Telegraph* proprietor Conrad Black – Barbara Amiel, whose column was due the following day. Alas Amiel declined, saying politely that she did not feel she could do the subject justice.

The *Torygraph* minions accepted this without argument. But they were somewhat bemused the next day to see a large comment piece entitled "Why we must still boldly go" in the London *Evening Standard*. It was an essay about the Columbia disaster by "international affairs commentator" Barbara Amiel.

JUST FANCY THAT!

If I see one more fading celebrity coming out against the war in Iraq, then I fear that I will feel like bombing Baghdad myself.

— Tony Parsons, page 17, *Mirror*, 10 February

Actress Emma Thompson proudly holds up the *Daily Mirror*'s No War front page poster... Holiday show presenter Anna Walker added her support... TV host Gabby Logan said "I don't think there should be action without justification". Backing the petition, TV doctor Hilary Jones said: "This would be a very damaging conflict."

— *Mirror*, page 2, 10 February.

O·B·N·K

Rupert Murdoch, the chairman and chief executive of **News Corporation**, the parent company of ***The Times***, and his wife **Wendi**, are expecting their second child. Congratulations.

ANDREW PIERCE
The Times

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

RELATIONS between Charlie Methven, the Brylcreemed hooray who edits the *Daily Telegraph*'s Peterbore diary, and his hapless adjutant Guy Adams have become decidedly strained as they prepare for the column's relaunch on 1 March. Although they sit opposite each other, the spotty youths communicate only by email and their correspondence betrays signs of wobbliness on the eve of their "bold new venture" (*sic*).

One problem has been thinking up a new title for Peterbore. Adams emailed Methven to say he considered the mooted "London Spy" a turn-off for readers outside the capital. "I would," he grumbled, "feel absurd introducing myself as Guy from London Spy." Methuen's emailed response was swift and dismissive: "Only a moron would think that such a column couldn't have sources and stories from elsewhere."

Adams fared little better when he suggested the new column should ape the "knowing" style of Adam Helliker's *Mail on Sunday* diary. Methven countered that Helliker's "blagging" cut no ice with sensible readers.

Methven's last communication suggests some dawning awareness of the immensity, not to say hopelessness, of his task. "Peterborough does have a historical cachet, but our advertising, marketing and PR people would say that it's the wrong cachet, a reputation for dusty stories about archdeacons and minor public schools..."

LAST MONTH the Dirty Digger's galley-slaves at HarperCollins in New York received an email which looked like a submission for the "Me and My Spoons" column.

"HarperCollins is pleased to announce a new employee program. When a baby is born or adopted into the family of one of our employees, HarperCollins will extend our congratulations by sending a sterling silver baby spoon engraved with the baby's name... We look forward to celebrating many happy moments with you and your families."

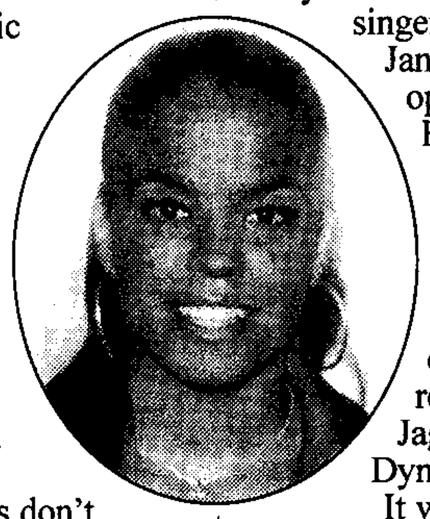
Such cute sentimental gestures aren't usually expected from companies run by Rupert Murdoch, and suspicious employees immediately guessed that there was only one explanation: the randy old goat had got Wendi Deng up the duff again. Sure enough, it has now been confirmed that Rupert and Wendi themselves will benefit from the silver-spoon programme.

Does the OAP media tycoon never find himself exhausted by the demands of his energetic young Chinese bride? Far from it. "Rupert very happy!" Wendi told a group of NewsCorp executives recently, with a lascivious gleam in her eye. "Rupert on Viagra!"

MS DYNAMITE-WATCH

THE young won't vote; they don't like politicians; and, worst of all, they've stopped buying newspapers. They also insist on listening to So Solid Crew and as a result are all shooting each other. What to do?

Call on Ms Dynamite, a photogenic black-but-not-too-black female MC whose name has been commandeered to make the Street of Shame sound "street" again. Hacks who think rap is something you do to Christmas presents are falling over themselves to namecheck her in a bid to keep it real.



It all began in late December when Ms Dynamite was interviewed for a slow news edition of *Newsnight*. In it she dropped such bombshells as: Britain is institutionally racist; schools don't teach much black history; and young people don't give two hoots about politicians. At a stroke the *bien pensant* press had a new mascot, with the *Observer* suggesting in a Christmas-break leader that Britain's establishment "might use the time to reflect upon some of Ms Dynamite's wise words".

The establishment certainly did reflect. Britain's most powerful man, Alastair Campbell, even went so far as to admit he would no longer be a Britney Spears fan: "I have switched my allegiance to someone new – Ms Dynamite. She is brilliant." Both Labour and the Lib Dems expressed an interest in using her as a face at the next election the very next day, conveniently forgetting what she had just said (that all MPs are useless).

But it wasn't until 20 January that Dynamania really hit Fleet Street. No fewer than four broadsheets splashed pictures of the singer on their front pages after she spoke out against gun crime at a rally following shootings in Birmingham. The concert had been shared with another black, anti-gun singer; but none of the papers ran pictures of poor Beverly Knight because she's less of a looker.

The main thrust of the ensuing Dynamania was that with the country threatened by the pernicious evil of So Solid Crew and its "bad" brand of gun-totin', ho-tauntin' rap, Ms Dynamite – who doesn't like guns, refuses to shake her booty and is available to speak on *Newsnight* – is an exemplary alternative. Dynamite's mother (white) is a teacher from the Hebrides; and Ms herself has A levels and was even offered a place at university! To the well-paid middle-class columnists cloistered in Canary Wharf, here at last was the acceptable face of black Britain. It also helps the picture desk that the acceptable face of black Britain is so, er, acceptable.

Not surprisingly the *Telegraph*, obsessed with yoof as ever, was particularly keen on the singer: Judith Woods borrowed her for a 25 January piece on executive travel, opining that "Catch a chicken bus in Bolivia and there's bound to be at least one Walkman leaking Ms Dynamite"; Rupert Christiansen labeled fast-rising conductor Emmanuelle Haim "The Ms Dynamite of French Baroque"; and even Norman Lebrecht cooed respectfully: "See how silly Mick Jagger's struttings look beside Ms Dynamite's directness."

It would appear that all of this hifalutin' praise may have gone to Ms D's head… much to the delight of the slathering tabloids. They built her up – "the hottest female artist in Britain at the moment" and then, in time-honoured fashion, slapped her down. Revealing that our heroine was pregnant, the *Sun*'s Dominic Mohan mused: "Let's hope the baby chills her out – it seems Ms Dynamite is getting too big for her booties." And if the baby doesn't chill her out, why not let the *Sun's* sister paper, the *News of the World*, do it for her, with a two-page "Ms Dynamite Stole My Man" exposé from her boyfriend's former lover on 26 January. "Ms Dynamite, who has risen to fame as the voice of decency from the streets, broke 22-year-old Sanshica Carew's heart."

But then Ms D came out against the war in Iraq… and bingo! Alastair Campbell may have to change his mind about her, but the *Mirror* was thrilled. Having appointed her a judge of its Pride of Britain awards and named her one of its women of 2002, it promptly appropriated her for its anti-war/pro-circulation campaign, quoting her on four occasions as part of the paper's Not in Our Name campaign.

This culminated in 1,000 words on her life and career the next weekend on the day she was due to perform at the Stop the War march. The day after the march, the *Sunday Mirror* was equally impressed: "The rap star stole the show from the biggest names in the world peace movement."

So, an icon for world peace. But also a nice bit of skirt: the same paper ran a picture of Ms Dynamite with her top falling off.

NATURALLY the *Sun* was delighted when Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams used an interview with the *Sunday Times* to criticize the government's apparent insensitivity to public concern over immigration.

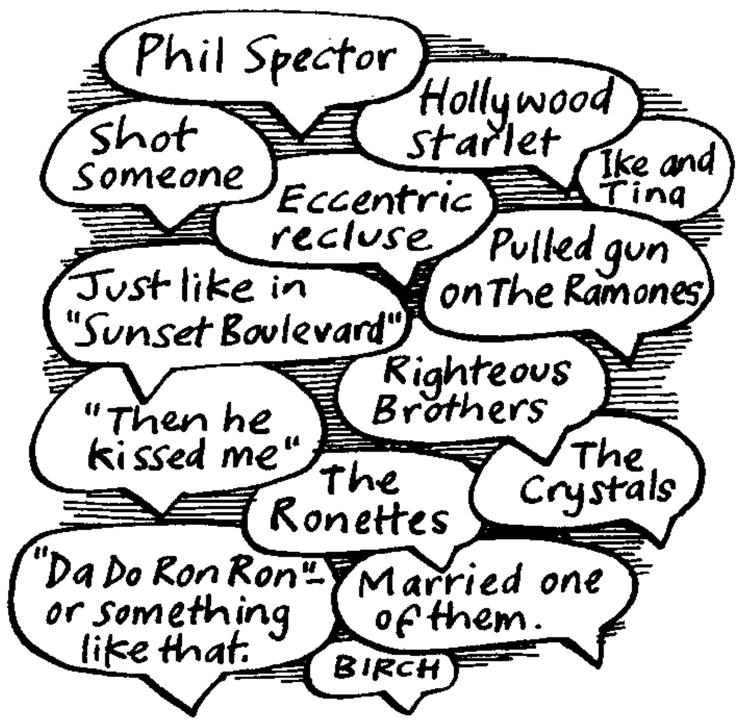
In a leader entitled "His Duty", the Murdoch rag genuflected before Williams, who "backs the *Sun*'s campaign on asylum seekers" (though he made no actual reference to the newspaper). It applauded "his boldness" and proclaimed that this was "a man in touch with reality [who] knows his duty is to his people." This slap on the back must have provided welcome relief to the archbish, whose accession to office had been greeted with derision by one tabloid in particular which persistently lampooned him as a limp-wristed beardie-weirdie with dangerous views on same sex relationships and school league tables. And the name of this recusant publication so contemptuous of the Anglican leader's public utterances? Step forward, the *Sun*.

***DAILY Mail* diarist John McEntee gets most of his celeb scoops by copying them out of *heat* magazine (on one occasion, as reported in *Eye* 1069, a week after *heat* had admitted the story in question wasn't true). But on 13 February… he had an exclusive of his own!**

JK Rowling's young daughter had gone for lunch in a restaurant near her home, where she played with her GameBoy during the meal. McEntee sneered that the child should have been reading a book.

This was a textbook scoop – the textbook in question being the press complaints commission (PCC) code of practice, which states that: "Where material about the private life of a child is published, there must be justification for publication other than the fame, notoriety or position of his or her parents or guardian." There wasn't.

Wall of Sound



"We looked at Joan having extensive plastic surgery but it was more cost effective for me to take on a younger, more attractive mistress…"

THE TRIAL OF THE CENTURY

CATHERINE Zeta Jones and Michael Douglas are so protective of their privacy and dignity they sold the photographic rights to their wedding to Richard "Dirty" Desmond's *OK!* magazine for £1m. Imagine their dismay, then, when a vulgar unauthorised snapper from *Hello!* managed to snatch a picture of the bride eating a slice of wedding cake.

Michael Tugendhat QC, counsel for the couple, claimed that the photo – which the *Sun* published under the headline "Catherine Eater Jones" – had "ridiculed" poor Catherine. "Nobody has ever seen a picture of a bride in which she's shown eating," he raged. "Such a thing does not exist. You do see pictures of women eating, but they tend to be in tacky yoghurt and ice-cream adverts."

But such a thing does exist, as Tugendhat should know. In August 2000 a celeb magazine paid a six-figure sum to Anthea Turner and Grant Bovey for photos of their wedding, but recouped some of the money by signing a sponsorship deal with Cadbury's. Anthea and Grant were duly photographed "enjoying Cadbury's new Snowflake", and the picture of the choc-guzzling bride was released to Fleet Street papers on condition they printed a caption puffing Snowflake.

What tawdry, downmarket mag would do such a thing to a woman on her wedding day? It was of course *OK!*, favourite publication of Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta Jones.

CROSS-EXAMINED by *Hello!*'s QC, Catherine Zeta Jones insisted that she and Douglas never sought personal publicity except to promote their films. Although they gave money to charity and good causes, for example, "we didn't feel it necessary to publicise the philanthropic things we do to the world."

Perhaps she's never looked at her husband's website, which carries the following greeting: "Welcome to the all-new MichaelDouglas.com, my official online home! We've redesigned the website for you, the fans, to thank you for all of your support. As always, my goal is to let you know about my social and charitible [*sic*] work, as well as my acting career."

There is a whole section devoted to showing just how much the great philanthropist does for sweet charidee through the Michael Douglas Foundation, "a non-profit organisation established in 1991 dedicated to improving the quality of life throughout the world… The Michael Douglas Foundation has given to over 90 charities since its inception. A few of the charities that have received support include…"

Since both Douglas and his wife apparently regard this self-congratulation as "unnecessary", no doubt it will be removed from the site forthwith.

THE war on terror isn't all bad news. Not for privatisation specialist Serco, anyway, which has won a £10m contract from the foreign office to improve defences at British embassies worldwide.

It will install eye-scanners, fingerprint reading doors and the like; but the government gave Serco the job just as it was threatening another high-profile security contract held by the firm. All juvenile prisoners were taken out of Serco's Ashfield young offenders' institute after prison service director Martin Narey named it the worst prison in Britain.

Winning the embassies contract has more to do with lobbying on security matters than Serco's performance. The firm spends serious money sponsoring conferences like the government-backed "Law Enforcement and National Security" gathering, and hiring former military staff. It has repeated run-ins with unions because of its squeeze on wages and jobs; but this doesn't seem to worry Britain's "new" Labour government.

THE 40,000 or so British troops, 16 ships and 150 aircraft sent into the gulf as "contingency preparations in relation to Iraq" are officially referred to by the MoD as Operation Telic.

There has been much speculation in military circles as to the provenance of the name. While those on the ground favour the simple acronym "Tell Everyone Leave Is Cancelled", another favourite is "Tinpot Evangelist Leads Islamic Crusade".

Meanwhile the Telic troops who have arrived in the field sans boots, clothing, the correct camouflage or desert-adapted weaponry, have been given an alternative nickname by their rather better-equipped US comrades: they are known simply as "The Borrowers".

MPs are determined to get to the bottom of the ministry of defence's scandalous part-privatisation of its research arm, Qinetiq, in a deal which made £42m but cost taxpayers twice as much in legal and advisory fees.

Llew Smith, MP for Blaenau Gwent, has tabled a series of awkward questions about the deal with US venture capitalists, the Carlyle Group. Not least is the way details of the deal were quietly slipped into the Commons library the day before the Christmas recess, denying MPs their 14 days to lodge and debate concerns. With Qinetiq valued at £500m, Carlyle Group had been expected to pay at least £150m for its third stake and management control. Smith and colleagues are concerned that parliament has agreed on the nod liabilities of around £100m.

As the last *Eye* revealed, the sale of thousands of acres of military training grounds and barracks – some of it former common land – for multi-million pound housing and commercial development raises even more questions about the deal. Smith and Co have so far failed to secure a debate on the need for "public accountability for the use or misuse of massive sums of public money" issue, but their complaints to the speaker of the House about the secretive way the MoD went about the deal with Carlyle has led to change in Commons rules. No longer will such matters be slipped into the library the day before a recess.

Mr Speaker Martin has also referred the matter to the public accounts committee. With the national audit office, which reports to the committee, already looking at the land deals, this matter is not going away.

SHAMBOLIC plans for a public debate on GM foods are likely to be pushed back until late summer amid wrangling over how much cash is to be made available for the various discussion events.

Professor Malcolm Grant, chair of the GM public debate steering board, has written to environment secretary Margaret Beckett suggesting that the three-month debate – due to be done-and-dusted by June – should be pushed back to later in the summer.

Prof Grant's letter, obtained by Friends of the Earth, grumbles that: "Being still unclear as to what resources are to be expected from government for the debate continues to blight our planning and we still have not been in a position to tell organisations what exactly we are planning."

The delay means the debate won't be concluded before the results of the farm-scale trials are published in July. This will delight anti-GM groups who claimed the debate would be a complete waste of space if it finished before the trial results were released.

Environment minister Michael Meacher recently admitted in a radio interview that the GM debate plans were moving "slower than we would have wished". He said £155,000 had already been added to the initial £250,000 earmarked for the debate.

The debate plans ran into trouble almost as soon as they were proposed last July, when a minister described them to the *FT* as a pro-GM "PR offensive".

BOUNDARY changes in Scotland may soon oblige Labour party chairman, John "the hammer" Reid to seek pastures new. And what better berth than Blaydon, County Durham, the seat being vacated by John McWilliam at the next election? Miraculously it has not been nominated as a "wimmin only shortlist".

Party loyalists in the north-east are said to be delighted that the no-nonsense party chairman might head their way. But before he does, the GMB union will have to be placated: it has a local union official in mind to succeed McWilliam. Then there is the über-Blairite Darren Murphy, currently a government special adviser. The on-message Murphy is the protégé of Labour chief whip Hilary Armstrong, whose bruising abilities may even be a match for "the hammer".

MORE news from sunny Normanton, the former coal mining constituency being eyed by Ed Balls, the man who put "endogenous" into "growth theory" and has prospered by the chancellor's side ever since.

Miraculously, a picture of Balls and Brown appeared in the *Wakefield Express* in January, picturing the happy pair beaming at an edition of the *Wakefield Express*! And happy they should be: the local rag had breathlessly reported Brown and Balls' paean of praise for job creation in the borough.

On closer inspection, though, the story, titled "High Praise for city progress" and published at the end of January, referred to a visit and speech from the dynamic duo the previous October! Gordon Brown may well have talked "exclusively to the *Wakefield Express*", but the paper neglected to mention that his words of wisdom, designed to boost Balls' candidacy, had been spoken three months previously.

PS: Normanton is next to Pontefract, which is represented by Mrs Balls, aka Yvette "Boy" Cooper. This would be pretty handy for sorting out baby sitters if husband Ed lands the seat next door.

PPS: "Balls" is certainly the response of many locals to claims that local unemployment is falling sharply. As the chancellor was telling the *Wakefield Express* about job creation in Normanton, the same edition bemoaned the loss of jobs caused by closure of the Prince of Wales colliery in Mrs Balls' Pontefract constituency.

OVERWORKED staff at the immigration and nationality department (IND) have been told not to process any asylum cases lodged before January 1999. Already, thousands of cases which would normally be sent for appeal are now held in a big holding file with no hint as to when they may proceed.

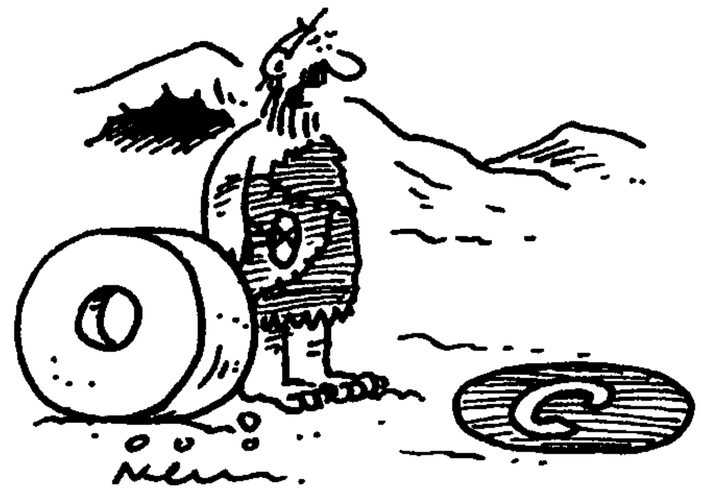
Could this extraordinary measure have anything to do with home secretary David Blunkett's promise that new asylum-seekers would have their cases decided within two months and appealed within four months of application? With all these old appeals clogging up the system, he couldn't keep to his word. As it was, IND operated a two-tier system: the Blunkett "2+4s" and then the slower "NON2+4s". Now there appears to be a "sometime never" category.

TUC NEWS

LEAPING from the starting blocks as Bill Morris announced his retirement as general-secretary of the Transport & General Workers' Union are four winsome heroes of the trade union movement.

They are: Brother Jack Dromey, the former Grunwick picket line militant, who married Harriet Harman, trimmed his beard, became a Blairista and then went all militant again when Mr Tony started to become unpopular with the brothers and sisters; Bro Tony Woodley, the Scouse motor trades negotiator with the easy wit and long forgotten links with the Murkeyside Militants; Bro Barry Camfield, secretary of the powerful Region 1, who doesn't have much of a media profile; and Bro Jimmy Elsby, the Scottish official with close ties to Gordon Brown.

All four will be vying hard to put clear red water between themselves and Tony Blair. So will any of them bother to canvass the T&G's most famous member now that the Queen Mother has snuffed it? Will either Jack, Tony, Barry or Jimmy pick up the phone and be asked to be put through to Number 10 to speak to the prime minister?



"I don't like the look of this"

IS THIS A RECORD?

AT LAST the national audit office (NAO) is to investigate the *Eye*'s old friend Capita and its pisspoor handling of the Criminal Records Bureau (*Eyes passim*), still dogged by unacceptable delay and inaccuracies.

But it might also care to look at another part of the system, which is not down the Capita: delay and inaccuracies on the police national computer on which the criminal records system relies.

Latest figures show that in some areas Knacker is taking months to record new convictions when it should take only seven days after a court decision. In the worst case in Cleveland it took one year and 54 days to log a conviction. In the Met area in London it took 248 days and in Gloucestershire, it took 290 days.

Latest home office figures show that on average across England and Wales, barely one-fifth of cases are logged in time. In some areas, like West Yorkshire, none was recorded within the time limit.

Napo, the probation officers' union, has highlighted the dangers posed to the reliability of court assessments, sentencing and employers' criminal record checks, caused by such delays.

'Backbiter'

ENERGY NEWS

THE financial services authority (FSA) found the perfect candidate to be its new director of quality assurance and internal audit: James Glass. Since 1998 he has been director of business review and audit at British Energy, a firm currently under investigation by... the FSA.

Somehow British Energy's audits and business reviews, carried out under Mr Glass, failed to predict the sudden appearance of a black hole in the accounts which forced the government to bail the firm out with £650m of public money.

The firm's massive liabilities and shrinking income made British Energy threaten bankruptcy to force this government subsidy. But it was the fact that British Energy boss Robin Jeffrey had told investors the firm was doing very well shortly before the collapse that led to the FSA investigation.

Jeffrey phoned investors to say: "I want to emphasise to you that we do not face a financial crisis." Immediately afterwards they faced a financial crisis of the most profound kind and Jeffrey's career at British Energy ended.

He had been both chairman and chief executive simultaneously, a practice generally condemned but apparently not picked up by the firm's internal audit and business review section (run by Mr J Glass).

JUST FANCY THAT!

February 4: The failed generator British Energy appoints a new chairman, Mike Alexander, chief operating officer at the country's biggest gas and electricity supplier, Centrica.

February 7: British Energy announces a four-year contract to supply up to 15 percent of its output to Centrica.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES

Personal Assistant

to Conservatories Party Member for North Wales

Advertisement, Daily Post

AS BRITAIN prepares for war with one despotic Middle Eastern torturer, defence minister Lord Bach has decided to arm another despotic Middle Eastern torturer.

At the end of January he announced that BAE Systems was selling Hawk jets to Bahrain, and that he was delighted to be doing business with "His Majesty Shaikh Hamed Isa Al Khalifa".

Bahrain has a long history of torture, although the political situation in Bahrain appeared to improve last year when the shaikh announced the first elections since 1973. However, while foreign secretary Jack Straw personally met the Bahraini crown prince to offer congratulations on the elections, most opposition parties boycotted the poll after the royal family removed the powers of the new assembly.

Both Britain and the US overlooked the boycott and backed the election, remembering perhaps that Bahrain buys their arms and plays host to US bases. Ironically, this meant Britain and America were forced to back the election of unrepresentative Islamist extremist parties, who won seats because of the boycott by the larger, more secular opposition.

The return to Bahrain of an alleged torturer has now alarmed local human rights activists. The US state department was even forced to admit that Bahrain had a "poor" human rights record. But none of this seemed to bother Lord Bach – who was previously minister responsible for the human rights act at the lord chancellor's department.

HIGH PRINCIPALS

YOU might think a reward would be in order for achieving the top teaching score in the country. But having managed that accolade last June, staff at Park Lane FE College in Leeds have been rewarded with a pay freeze.

In last summer's Ofsted inspection, 77 percent of lecturers were either "good" or "outstanding" – the best result any FE college has yet achieved.

Lecturers union Natfhe says restructuring by principal Tony Longworth means dedicated classroom teachers will not get any pay rise this year. Extra pay will be available – but only to those whose work also includes some management.

HAVING coughed up the average £7,500 course costs and living expenses to complete a degree, students at Staffordshire University were shocked to be charged an extra £15 to attend their own graduation ceremonies.

Still, the fee will entitle the students to a parking space outside the leisure centre where the ceremony is to be held.

The National Union of Students says Staffordshire isn't the only place trying to extract the last drop of cash as graduates embark on their deeply indebted lives. "It's another back-door top up fee. Charges for graduation ceremonies are creeping in," said a spokesman.

UNPOPULAR MUSIC

LIKE many a one-hit-wonder, Sheffield's National Centre for Popular Music opened with a fanfare, flopped disastrously and is now to become a cult student thing.

Yorkshire Forward, the current owner of the flopped National Centre for Popular Music, is negotiating to get shot of the £15m building by giving it away to local students as their students' union. A final decision on its fate will follow Sheffield Hallam University's board meeting on 18 February.

The strange-looking stainless steel centre was built with lottery money and opened in 1999 with massive publicity. It attracted just a quarter of the predicted 400,000 visitors and closed after six months. Pop memorabilia was sheepishly given back to the stars who had donated it.

Regional development body Yorkshire Forward then spent £1.8m taxpayers money to buy the building, ostensibly to ensure it stayed in public use.

Campaign group Pride in Sheffield put forward a plan to turn it into a conference and exhibition centre, to stop it becoming "a fun palace for middle class students". But the scheme was rejected last month because it would have needed yet more public subsidy.

Yorkshire Forward said that issues such as whether the university would have to pay even a token amount for the building were still being hammered out.

In The Courts

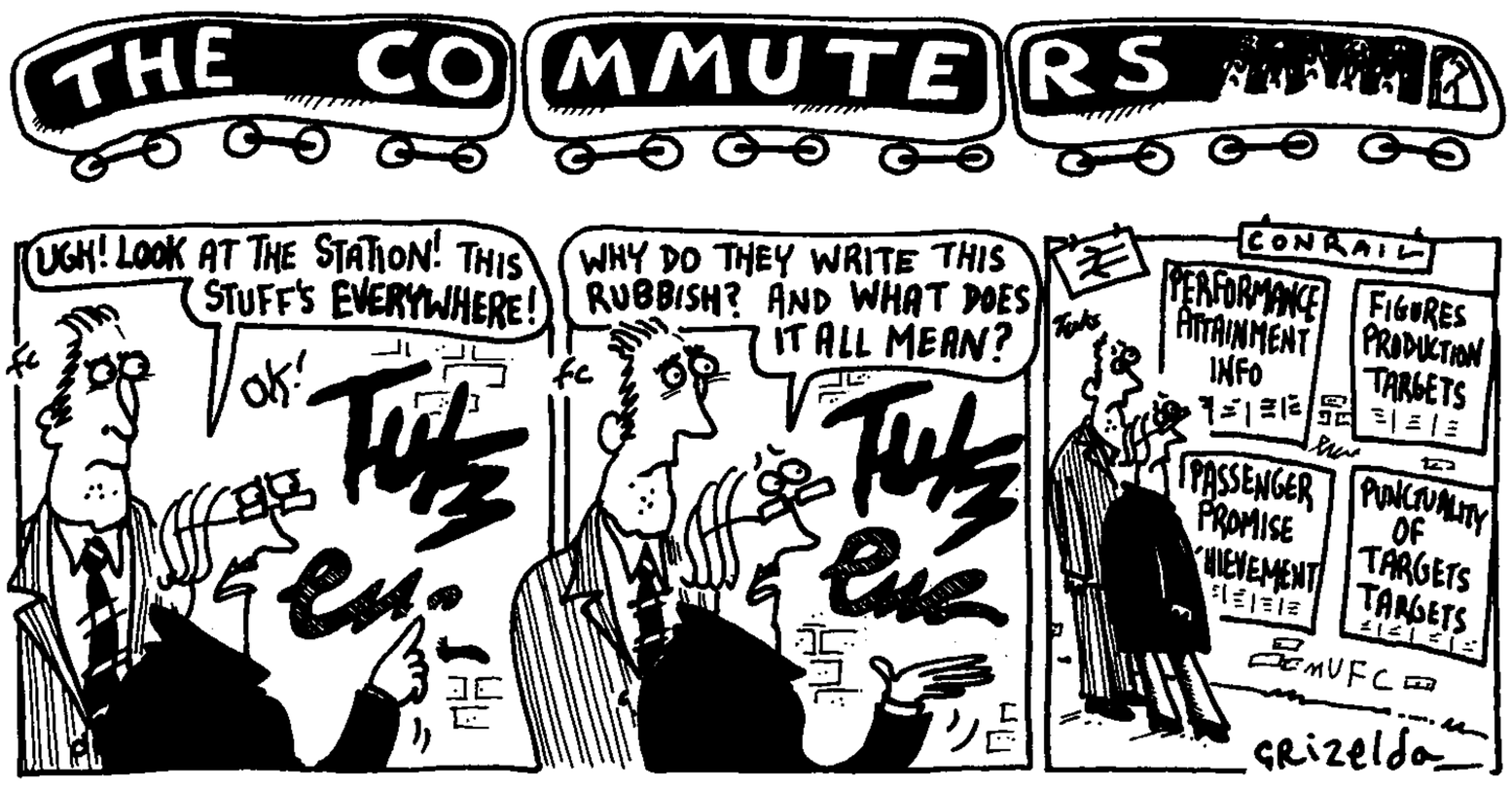
STRANGE goings-on at Trafford magistrates' court, where would-be beaks have been turned away from the bench en masse.

Around a dozen people – all the new lay magistrates who were due to join the bench this year – were rejected by the Duchy of Lancaster just as they were about to start their volunteer roles. The names and details of the new magistrates were already printed in "magistrates' books" and have had to be covered with sticky labels.

Those who were turned down had already received a year's costly training and had all given up their free time unpaid to sit in court and observe cases. The Trafford bench has been told the reason for the unusual rejection was "political bias"; but no detail has been given of how the applicants were imbalanced. One source said they didn't know the political affiliations of the would-be magistrates but they came from all over the area and represented a wide social mix.

Local magistrates say it is bizarre that every single applicant was refused, rather than simply trying to balance out the political affiliations. Staff at the cabinet office (which deals with queries for the Duchy of Lancaster) were unable to explain why the applicants had been rejected, saying "there was no rejection by us of advice from up there".

The failure to appoint the new lay magistrates may, however, create work for Trafford's new stipendiary magistrate, district judge David Tapp. Judge Tapp was arrested in November 2001 along with prominent Liverpool lawyer Kevin Dooley (who was struck off by the Law Society and remains under police investigation), district judge Paul Firth and six magistrates court clerks. After a six-month investigation into serious corruption allegations, involving premiership football tickets, it was decided that no further action would be taken against Tapp, Firth or three of the clerks; but he has never again sat in a Liverpool court. He was given the new job in Trafford at the end of 2002.



TV

The Second Coming
Tonight Special – Michael Jackson
Footballers' Wives
Surprise Wedding
(all ITV1)

A CASUAL reader of the papers might get the impression that things are really good at ITV1 at the moment and that Nigel Pickard – the ex-kids' honcho from the Beeb who's just taken over the channel – has come in at an excellent time.

After all, the **Tonight Special** in which Wacko admitted to Basho that he still feels like a little boy from time to time, scored 15 million viewers, an astonishing performance for a documentary in a time of multi-channel expansion. And **The Second Coming**, in which the writer of *Queer As Folk* imagined Jesus coming back in Manchester, was rightly acclaimed by the critics.

And yet nothing at ITV1 is quite as it seems. Both of those apparently successful shows reveal the problems the network currently has.

Take the Wacko-Basho spat. *Tonight With Trevor McDonald* – which you hesitate to call the parent programme in this context – has been short of audiences since it started and was now pulling them in like a soap. But the point of *Tonight* was to bring in a sizeable weekly audience to the channel, to be one of the bankers on which advertisers could depend.

By doing so well with a one-off, the programme simply underlines how poorly it does on the regular days when it's not featuring a mega-star being accused of paedophilia but instead has Jonathan Maitland trying to open a bank account while posing as an asylum-seeker.

The theory of "event television" – big spectacles which bring attention to a channel – works well for the BBC. The glow from something like *The Lost Prince* or Paxo's chats with Blair can be used to justify the licence fee to ministers for several months. ITV1, though, needs weekly and nightly "events". The advertisers simply want to be told the dates when Bashir is going head to head with the Pope or the Queen so they can book slots.

"The dog's going through the trash again"

Both *The Second Coming* and **Footballers' Wives** are examples of a different problem for the network: attracting the wrong audience. Russell T Davies's Manchester Messiah will win awards. But it brought in only five million viewers rather than the minimum eight for which third channel drama must aim and failed to grab the mass popular audience.

It's the same with *Footballers' Wives*, which has become a talking-point over the cafetières rather than over the pints and Bacardi Breezers in the pub, which was the point. Under David Liddiment, its last boss, the network consistently commissioned *Guardian* programmes for a *Sun* audience and the legacy of this approach shows in both its ratings and advertising revenue.

The other side of that problem is that the channel is no good at trash. **Surprise Wedding** – a sort of *Blind Date* with an altar waiting at the end instead of a holiday – is an imitation of a vulgar American format. That kind of thing used to be fine; but in a digital and multi-channel age, viewers can switch over and watch the actual US crap.

So, depressingly, both the successes and the failures on ITV1 are failing to get the audience they're supposed to.

'Remote Controller'

DUMB BRITAIN

Breakfast Show, Radio Hallam, Sheffield
Presenter: Of which European country is Lisbon the capital?
Contestant: Australia.
Presenter: Sorry, that's the wrong answer; we'll go to the next caller.
Second contestant: I were going to say Australia as well. Is it Gibraltar?

National Lottery Jetset, BBC1
Eamonn Holmes: Who wrote *The Catcher In The Rye*?
Contestant: Chaucer.

The Weakest Link, BBC2
Anne Robinson: What is the name of the bodily fluid secreted by the lachrymal Glands?
Contestant: Semen.

MEDIA NEWS

THE TV trade is unparalleled in its ability to give prizes to itself, and there were trebles-all-round at the biggest back-slapping jamboree of them all, the *Broadcast* magazine awards, held recently at the Grosvenor House hotel in London.

Some television awards have at least a sense of independence about them. *Broadcast* makes no such pretence. There were 16 categories ranging from Best Light Entertainment Programme to Best News Programme, and 21 judges who appeared to know one another rather well. Their general policy seemed to be that awards should go to people they commission programmes from – or, even better, to themselves.

The Best News Programme award went to the BBC *Ten O'Clock News*. By happy coincidence Mark Damazer, the deputy controller of news at the BBC, sat on the judging panel, along with five of his BBC colleagues. In total the BBC won five awards.

The winner of the International Sales Award went to the BBC programme *Changing Rooms*, made by Endemol – whose chairman, Peter Bazalgette, was a judge. Endemol also picked up an award for *Big Brother*.

Not to be outdone, RDF Media won Best Documentary Series and was highly commended in the Popular Factual Programme category. One of the judges, Stephen Lambert, must have been particularly delighted: his day job is director of programmes at RDF Media.

Still, no doubt the eminent judges studied all the entries carefully before reaching their verdict. Or perhaps not: a judge told one winner that only half of the panel had actually viewed his winning entry.

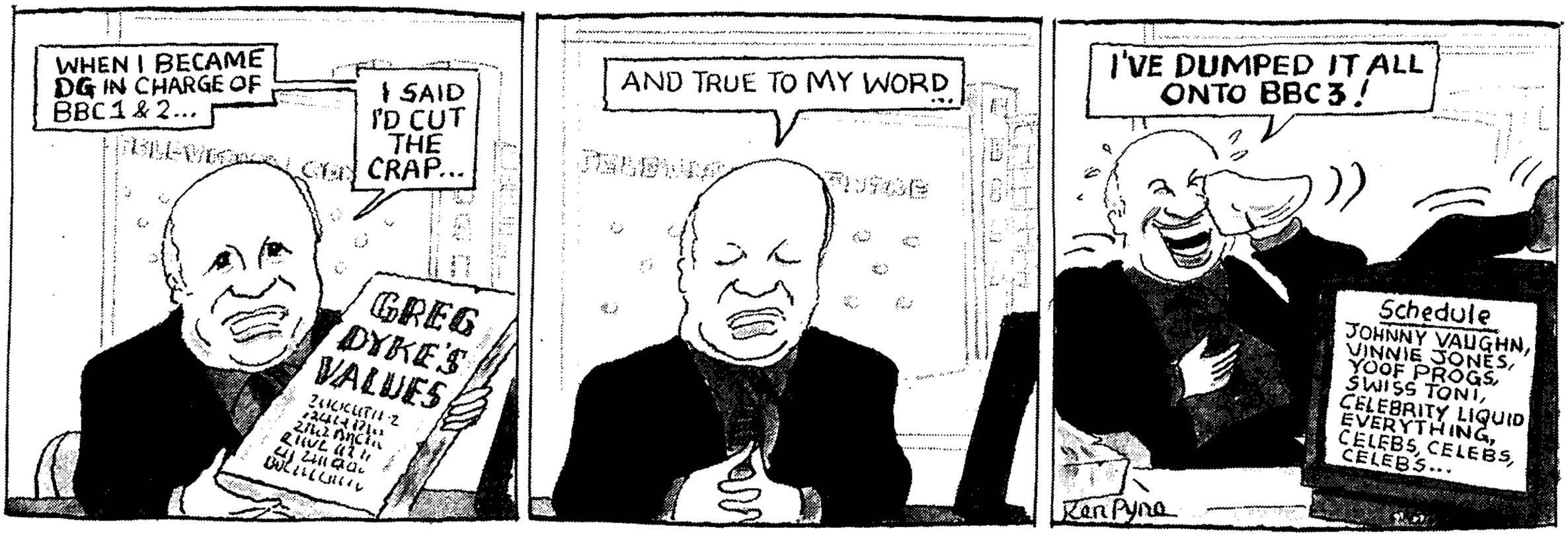
"2.5m tune to BBC Three", boasted the Beeb's in-house rag *Ariel* following the launch of its new £97m – yes, £97m - digital channel.

This fantasy viewing figure included those who watched the simulcast on BBC2. Take them away, and BBC Three's launch night audience falls to a more accurate average of, er, 147,000 viewers.

And what of Three's news and current affairs output, which was so crucial in securing government approval? On launch night, in a crapumentary which, according to the Beeb, "proves our public service commitment", we learned that excessive alcohol impairs judgement and damages the body. Still to come is a series that demonstrates that it's impossible to live in a mansion in Florida on an average UK pension.

In fact a full four and a half hours of Three's daily nine-hour output are given over to the "celeb" fixated *Liquid News*, and its various *Hello!*-style spin-offs. So much for Three's mission to attract "an intelligent, sophisticated audience".

Bets are already being placed at White City on the likely date for the inevitable relaunch.


WHEN I BECAME DG IN CHARGE OF BBC1 & 2...
I SAID I'D CUT THE CRAP...
GREG DYKE'S VALUES
AND TRUE TO MY WORD...
I'VE DUMPED IT ALL ONTO BBC3!
Schedule
JOHNNY VAUGHN, VINNIE JONES, YOOF PROGS, SWISS TONI, CELEBRITY LIQUID EVERYTHING, CELEBS, CELEBS, CELEBS...
Ken Pyne

RUN VT

A celebration of totally pointless news packages...

BBC newshound John Kay presented an item on 12 February about two women "who have different views about the war".

One was a peace campaigner and the other supported military action and Kay arranged for them to meet in Plymouth. After a dull sequence of exchanges, he summed up: "They agreed to differ."

HOWEVER bad BBC news output becomes, ITV News remains immeasurably worse.

ITV News editors know what their advertisers want from "news" programmes. Hence on 4 February they ran stories about Kylie's underwear and Michael Jackson's increasingly sad existence but failed to report an important vote on the future of the House of Lords.

Meanwhile, on the day ITV's lunchtime news revealed that "Kate Winslet is happy with her fuller figure", it failed to mention the latest Osama bin Laden tape, patients blocking beds, a possible UN security council motion on North Korea, a Bank of England report on house price inflation and new research about the origins of the universe – all were covered in full by rival news organisations which depend less on lifestyle surveys.

Michael Jackson's interview with Martin Bashir was subject to a spectacularly shameless piece of cross-promotion when ITV handed nearly half its evening news bulletin following the interview to "reaction in the music world" to Jackson's words. It then managed to slip the story in some guise or other into bulletins for the next seven days (including the exclusive revelation that Kylie Minogue had, er, watched the programme).

A full fortnight after the documentary was aired, visitors to the ITV news website were still being offered five options. Did they want to know about Britain, World, Sports, Entertainment... or Michael Jackson?

IN Michael Moore's film *Bowling for Columbine*, footage used to illustrate football hooliganism and violence includes shots of the Hillsborough disaster credited to the BBC.

This material was sold to Moore despite Lord Justice Taylor's ruling that violence and hooliganism played no part in the tragedy. Naturally the relatives of those who died were outraged at such commercial exploitation.

This is not the first time the BBC has used Hillsborough footage in this way. Footage has also been sold to The Learning Channel, where it appears whenever a script includes the words "football" and "violence" together.

It was also used by TLC as a trailer for *The Ultimate Survival Quiz*, in which survivors of riots told their stories. Again Lord Justice Taylor's report established that rioting was not a factor. TLC was forced to remove it.

A mere two months later, TLC broadcast *Sporting Disasters* in which the Hillsborough disaster was described as "one of the worst acts of hooliganism". Another TLC documentary, *Roman Blood Sports* was pulled after distressed relatives again saw footage of Hillsborough – again sold on by the BBC.

BBC2 interrupted its normal programming to go live to New York on 14 February to hear Hans Blix present his crucial report on Iraqi weapons inspections to the UN security council.

It was a big breaking story – but not that big at the Beeb. Just as the French were giving their response, BBC2 returned to Ainsley Harriott's *Ready Steady Cook*.

The brothers, who work together as widow cleaners, appeared side by side at Furness Magistrates Court.

North Western Evening Mail

DAWN AIREY of BSkyB was fulsome in her praise for new recruit Sara Ramsden, who takes over as controller of Sky One in March.

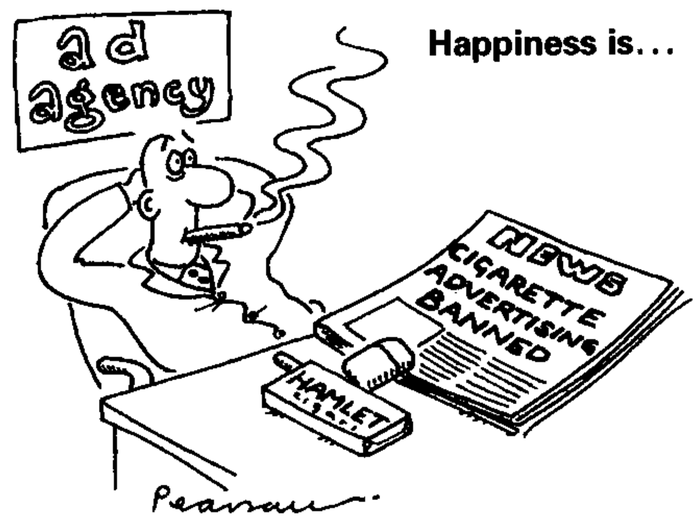
"Sara is a highly accomplished and creative television executive who knows the Sky One market perfectly," says Airey. She certainly does to judge by her work in her old job in charge of science and education for Channel 4.

Ramsden stretched the brief to include *Scrapheap Challenge* and dating show *Perfect Match*, but rejected one pitch for a series on the evolution of mothering behaviour with the following advice: "It might be best to see whether there's a punchy one hour for Equinox. If you concentrated on the mothers murdering their children, it could be very grabby." She will go far on Sky One.

DAISY Goodwin, pulchritudinous presenter of BBC2's new *Essential Poems*, is "tipped as the 'new Nigella', only with poetry". So claimed the *Guardian* on 8 February, in a guide to up-and-coming telly stars. But who is doing the tipping?

The inspiration for the *Grauniad*'s remark appeared to be an interview with Goodwin from the *Independent* of 28 January, in which she insisted: "I'm so not the next Nigella." She returned to the theme when interviewed by Anthony Quinn for *Observer Food Monthly* on 9 February, complaining that "I just know they're going to style me 'the Nigella of poetry'."

Well, perhaps they will if she keeps mentioning it. However, an exhaustive search of the cuttings confirms that the only person to make the comparison so far is, er, Daisy herself.



Happiness is...

AD NAUSEAM

KEEN-EYED readers and Pot Noodle devotees will recall that *Eye* 1066 told of plans to release a hilarious "Pot Curry" flavour, on the back of the excitement surrounding the John Major/Edwina Currie liaison.

At the time, Ad Nauseam contacted the PR department at Unilever Bestfoods, which manufactures Pot Noodle, and was told that although the story had appeared in the *Sun* it was just a joke – Unilever's product development schedule meant no new product could be manufactured for at least three months, by which time "nobody will be interested in Edwina", as they put it.

Imagine our surprise when Freud Communications, Pot Noodle's PR agency, contacted the *Eye* to see if we'd be interested in some sneak pictures of Edwina Currie advertising... the newly-launched Pot Curry. "We have shot Edwina in a series of clichéd politician-photocall poses outside the Houses of Parliament," said Freud's. "We could supply you with one exclusive shot, or a selection of visuals for a picture-led story or feature based around the theme of how ex-politicians are earning much more once they're out of office [or] how the guise of respectability for politicians slips when they leave public service and begin endorsing products."

Surely Freud's isn't suggesting that we make a mug of Edwina for being so cheap as to sign up to a celebrity endorsement? And if so, what would Edwina think of the manoeuvrings by Freud's – which, like her, is employed by Pot Noodle – to make her look stupid?

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

The Wizard of Ozzy Osbourne

OUT OF CON-TEXT

THOSE wavering over whether songs from 100 hit musicals are enough to compensate for the presence of Gyles Brandreth might be swayed by the *Independent on Sunday*'s opinion of his musical extravaganza, *Zipp!*

"BOOK NOW" declares the quote attributed to the paper on the show's ads. Reviewer David Benedict did indeed use those two words. "If schoolboy innuendo is your bag, book now," was his exact phrase, though he advised everyone else to avoid what he described as "shoddily directed... tedium".

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

AT SOPHIE DAHL'S BOOK SIGNING:
OBVIOUSLY IT TOOK ME A LONG TIME TO WRITE THIS...
I'VE NEVER DONE ANYTHING THAT REQUIRES SO MUCH BRAINWORK BEFORE...
...BUT NOW I'M READY TO SIGN ANOTHER ONE!!!

DOWN ON THE FARM

ROBERT UHLIG, the *Daily Telegraph*'s farming correspondent, certainly put the cat among the free-range chickens with an article headed "Free-range farms will be forced to stamp every egg".

This curdled the blood of poultry-loving readers by revealing how a new "EU directive" was going to force hundreds of free-range egg farmers out of business by insisting that every egg must be stamped with a mass of information, almost down to where in the farmyard it was laid. "Under the new directive," wrote Uhlig, "eggs will have to be stamped with the method of production, the country of origin, the code for the producer-packer, a best-before date and, if the farmer is a member of the scheme, the British Lion mark."

This was enough to get *Telegraph* readers rushing for their word processors. A keeper of "32 free-range hens and four bantam pullets" complained that, in the case of his bantam eggs, he would need two to have room for all the details required by Brussels. Another opined he would have to put up signposts to instructing the hens which bush to lay under, so he could record the details on the shell. All of which might have seemed meat and drink to those inhabiting the wilder shores of euroscepticism. The only problem was that Uhlig did not seem to have read this particular item of legislation very carefully, since like most emanations from Brussels it is a self-parody of gobbledygook.

A typical sentence reads "Based on the experience gained and following the adoption of council directive 1997/74/EC of 19 July 1997 laying down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens, the detailed provisions regarding the optional indications of the various farming methods should be adapted with a view to reducing the number of such methods and to redefine the terms which may be used in the different Community languages in particular for the keeping of hens in battery cages."

But once the fog has cleared it is possible here and there to make out thickets of meaning; and what emerges bears little resemblance to Uhlig's picture. For a start it does not apply to all those flocks of free-range hens clucking round the orchard of the average *Telegraph* reader. It is directed at commercial packers handling no fewer than 3,600 eggs a day. In other words, you would have to be in business in a fairly serious way before needing to worry about this latest example of Brussels's mania for regulating every nook and cranny.

It is true the profit margin on eggs is so tiny that for some smaller commercial producers the £7,000 cost of a special inkjet egg-printer may be enough to drive them out of business. But far from having to cover each egg with a mass of fine print, down to the Christian name of the hen that laid it, pretty well all the producer has to stamp on its shell, apart from an "eat before" date, is one word distinguishing whether it is from a caged hen ("cage"), a barn egg ("barn") or genuinely free range: in which case all you need print on the egg is "free", which might baffle any customer who is then asked to pay for it. Like most things emerging from Brussels, in short, it is really just a daft waste of time.

'Muckspreader'

DOING THE ROUNDS

Second opinion

SUE NOXALL, nursing coordinator for the charity Women's Health Concern, has written an illuminating letter to the NHS Executive asking if NHS patients have the right to a second opinion.

Roberta Wallis, from the department of health's customer service centre (sic), replies: "Patients have no right in law to a second opinion – this has always been the case… the majority of rights outlined in the Patient's charter are quasi or implied rights and as such are not backed by statute… However, doctors are advised by the General Medical Council that it is good professional practice for patients to be free to seek a second opinion, and this is enshrined in GMC guidance to doctors."

In practice most doctors will arrange a second opinion; although given the difficulty in getting a first one it leads to long delays. But patients have little protection from those few doctors who refuse to allow another opinion. Countless studies have shown that different doctors make different diagnoses or suggest widely different treatments with any given patient. One study even found that the same doctor treats the same patient differently on different days!*

If you get into the right part of the NHS first time, you can get truly excellent care. But if you end up in the wrong part with a doctor unaware of his or her limitations and duties, you're… stuffed.

Out of Hours

"NEW" Labour's big selling point for its much-delayed new GP contract is the chance for GPs to get out of 24-hour responsibility for patients.

This follows a national survey of GP opinion, which found an overwhelming desire for GPs to ditch out of hours care (OOH). So who *is* going to provide it?

The government's initial vision was for all OOH calls to be screened by NHS Direct, the nurse-run helpline, with those in need referred to on-call centres staffed by the odd GP still willing to do OOH and run by the primary care trust.

Alas, Labour set up NHS Direct as an independent venture, treading on the toes of many GPs who'd effectively sorted out their OOH by forming co-operatives. At their best, co-ops provide an excellent service with most of the GPs working a manageable one or two shifts a month, in addition to their daytime duty. Although NHS Direct was supposed to reduce the pressure on OOH, in reality it has led to a lot of duplication of effort (seriously ill patients having to be triaged twice, first by a nurse, then a GP) and some inappropriate referrals.

Belatedly the government has tried to get co-ops and NHS Direct to integrate. Some of these pilots have been successful, but others have taken aeons to integrate and in three areas (Dartford/Gravesend, Moray and Shropshire), the co-ops have pulled out or are threatening to. The situation is now so confused that the emergency care tsar, George Alberti, is advising health secretary Alan Milburn to cut back the provision of OOH by NHS Direct.

If the resources squandered on NHS Direct had gone into co-ops in the first place, then OOH for much of the country could well have been sorted by now. Alas, many co-op GPs may now decide to opt out of OOH, leaving primary care trusts over a barrel to private companies who provide on call services at four times the cost. As for patients, many will just give up and head straight for 999 and casualty.

* *"Do GPs act consistently when they meet the same patient twice?"* British Medical Journal, *19 April 1997.*

M.D.

ROAD RAGE

THOUGH predictable anger at the London congestion charge is directed at mayor Ken Livingstone, the real culprits are successive Labour and Tory governments who have refused to institute a balanced transport policy for the past 40 years.

Both parties are so eager to appease the road lobby they've poured billions into new roads and hidden subsidies for road vehicles while allowing public transport to decay and fares to rocket.

The only significant new heavy-rail service in central London in 40 years is Thameslink, created on the cheap in the 1980s with a disused rail tunnel and minimal new track. It was quickly swamped with passengers and plans were unveiled for modest expansion by 2000. That scheme is *still* dogged by government apathy and staff are now being laid off. It won't be finished until well after the Chunnel high-speed line starts decanting hordes of Kent commuters at St Pancras (for onward travel on already packed tube and Thameslink trains). The east-west Crossrail, though modelled on Paris' regional express routes, has suffered a similar fate to Thameslink.

Changes to the rail network have also forced more people to enter the capital on journeys between destinations outside London, adding to tube overcrowding. The Oxford-Cambridge line closed 30 years ago and plans to restore it were recently thwarted by the "strategic" rail authority (SRA). Promised trains through the Chunnel from British cities other than London were dropped because they'd be unprofitable.

Since 1980 UK bus fares have risen 31 percent in real terms and rail fares by 37 percent, while motoring costs have stayed the same. Yet it's motorists who say they're being ripped off by fuel prices and now by the congestion charge. For decades train passengers have paid a hefty premium to travel at peak times. Livingstone's congestion charge simply extends the principle to the most over-subscribed roads.

Motorists also accuse Red Ken of failing to consult them, although the congestion charge was the biggest promise in his election manifesto. When "new" Labour was elected in 1997 it was committed to reducing road traffic and increasing journeys by bicycle and on foot. It has reneged on all these commitments to appease the road lobby; and transport secretary Alistair Darling is now even refusing to slow the growth of traffic.

Livingstone is the first politician for generations to stand up to these powerful vested interests; and he faces a rough ride. Tony Blair and co have already palmed off responsibility (and blame) for any traffic-reduction measures to local authorities. By refusing to voice clear support for London's congestion charge they're showing again how spineless they are.

'Hedgehog'

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

WE'VE GOT THE TESTS BACK... AND YOU'VE GOT TWO CHOICES...
WE COULD DO NOTHING, OR WE COULD PUT YOU ON THE WAITING LIST FOR AN OPERATION
MORE LIKE ONE CHOICE REALLY

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

ASHEN-FACED

KETTERING borough council (KBC) seems reluctant to answer questions about its relationship with a firm of consultants hired during the tenure of its former chief executive — who then went to work for the company concerned.

In 2000 KBC hired Wallingford-based consultants Kendric Ash on a £300,000 contract, which was not put out to tender, to "advise" on the administration of benefits and council tax. It dropped them mysteriously a year later with a £99,000 compensation payoff. In the meantime, by coincidence, Kendric Ash had appointed the council's acting chief executive Di Bligh as a director.

Soon after Kendric Ash arrived it moved half the fraud detection staff into the revenues (council tax) department. For a few months prior to KA coming in, debt recovery had been suspended. It then resumed; and Kendric Ash received commission for clearing the backlog.

Last December the *Eye* started asking KBC why it had terminated its contract with Kendric Ash. One of our questions was: "If KA was doing a generally satisfactory job, the contract must have been terminated for some other reason. Can the council categorically confirm that no unlawful or potential or actual fraudulent activity was discovered or suspected in relation to the way benefit claims were handled?"

It took Kettering 10 weeks and several reminders to come up with the following: "The appointment of Kendrick [sic] Ash was approved at a meeting of the full council on 5 July 2000. Their remit was to help improve the revenues service. KA achieved a substantial and rapid turnaround in quality and financial performance and developed a new management team, to the point where they were able to successfully assume responsibility for the service. The payment profile is a confidential contractual matter, but did involve a final payment on successful completion of their work." So there.

SUSSEX OFFENDER

SO FAREWELL, then, to the barbed wire, old fridges and a barn which for 13 years blocked a footpath across the Sussex estate of jailed killer Nicholas van Hoogstraten.

Kate Ashbrook, former chair of the Ramblers Association, was last week invited by liquidators disposing of the bankrupt's estate to cut the first strand of barbed wire after East Sussex county council served a notice ordering them to clear the path within 28 days.

ESCC's attempts to take credit for the reopening are a bit rich considering the council neglected its statutory duty for more than a decade and then spent £76,000 of taxpayers' money fighting Ms Ashbrook in the courts — a bill that may yet be met from the council's footpaths maintenance budget.

● PANIC grips County Hall on the Isle of Wight as councillors and officers struggle to keep next financial year's council tax rise below 18 percent – following last year's not bad 13.5 percent. The hunt is on for cuts, and libraries always make an easy target. Five have been identified the axe by education director David Pettitt. One is in the village of Niton, a mere tome's-throw from the tomb in the parish churchyard of one Edward Edwards… co-founder of the public library movement in Britain.

LAMBETH WALK

UNITY has broken out in Lambeth council chamber, where councillors of all three parties have put their differences behind them and ordered chief executive Faith Boardman to give evidence at a public inquiry into racism in the council's housing department.

One of the concerns the inquiry will address is Boardman's alleged role in orchestrating a witch-hunt which led to the sacking of Alex Owolade, a former Unison shop steward.

Owolade, a homeless persons adviser, was sacked in November 2001 after he complained of discrimination and bullying against black staff in the community alarms service (LCAS), a section responsible for running an emergency control system for vulnerable people living in sheltered accommodation.

The departure of Owolade, who is a prominent local black activist, had evidently long been on Faith Boardman's mind. In August 2001 she made a direct approach to the leader of the Tory group, John Whelan, and told him, "We are constructing a disciplinary case against Owolade so we can dismiss him once and for all from the council's service", before adding that she was "seeking an all party consensus to get Owolade out of the building". Whelan noted: "I concluded from this exchange with the chief executive that a management decision had been made to dismiss Owolade, but that there was insufficient evidence."

HOT WATER

THE temperature of Bath's famous spa waters has risen sharply following news that the council's scheme to reopen the city's natural springs has missed its third opening date.

Only three years late and hopelessly over-budget, the £27m Bath Spa scheme, which has been partly funded by an £8m grant from the Millennium Commission, is now costing council taxpayers £30,000 for every week its opening is delayed.

In the meantime, the council is considering asking the commission for yet more cash — this time to pay for a £250,000 canopy over the Spa's open-air rooftop pool. Quite why the glass monstrosity requires a covering at this late stage isn't clear.

● SEASONED Lambeth-watchers have long known that the borough occupies a different dimension in space and time. Callers who telephone its Clapham Common neighbourhood housing office out of hours are greeted with a recorded message giving details of Christmas opening times… in 1994.

BRUM DO

CONGRATULATIONS to Birmingham city council's former chief executive Stewart Dobson, who has landed a £70,000-a-year job running a new science museum in the city.

Dobbo, 55, retired from his £160,000-a-year post last November on an inflation-proof pension of nearly £100,000. He is now acting chief executive at Thinktank, a millennium project subsidised to the tune of £1.3m a year by Brum council taxpayers. His new employer? Er, Birmingham city council.

● LAST issue we reported that the runner-up in Rotten Boroughs' coveted brass-necked councillor of the year award, Dennis Heptonstall, had announced that he is stepping down from East Staffordshire district council in May. Now comes sad news of the award's winner, former Lincolnshire county council leader Jim Speechley, who got the gong for taking more than six months to resign after the publication of a damning auditor's report. Last week he was charged with "misconduct in public office" and bailed to appear before Boston magistrates on 19 February.

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

IN 2001 the Eye revealed the exploits of Brian Lees, disgraced head of Glossopdale community college, Derbyshire, who stole vast sums of money and equipment, accessed porn on the school computer and bought his own children university books and computers from the school fund *(Eyes passim)*.

So it was obviously important for the school to appoint a replacement whose reputation for financial probity was beyond reproach. Step forward John Hart, 55, who moved the eight miles from Egerton Park Arts College, in Denton, near Manchester, and has been head at Glossopdale since July 2001.

As head of a highly successful school, Hart seemed just the man to lead Glossopdale out of the wilderness. At his interview he was asked the inevitable question: "Is there anything you should tell us that will affect your ability to take up this job?" Absolutely not, came the reply.

It had evidently slipped Mr Hart's mind that both Tameside council and the Inland Revenue had launched investigations into his former school's finances, following an audit which pointed to massive financial irregularities. It seems Hart was in the unfortunate habit of paying occasional staff in cash, "no questions asked", out of the school fund – which is illegal. And he had run up a school debt of more than £250,000.

IT'S ©ONGESTED UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

I'M ALL FOR THE CONGESTION CHARGE – IT'S VITAL TO WEED OUT THOSE INDIVIDUALS MAKING GRATUITOUS JOURNEYS
ANYTHING THAT THINS DOWN THE HERD HAS GOT TO BE GOOD NEWS FOR LONDON!
£5 A DAY FOR A FABULOUS CINNAMON BRIOCHE!
BARGAIN!
OPEN
RODOLPHE'S Patisserie

NOOKS and CORNERS

THE story goes that Charles Harbord, 5th Baron Suffield, got so fed up with the expense of entertaining "Tum Tum", the future King Edward VII, at his Norfolk seat, Gunton Park, he set the house on fire. This sensitive concern with architecture seems to have been inherited by the Rt Hon Robert Harbord-Hamond, the youngest son of the 11th Baron Suffield and the wayward member of a family which still owns vast tracts of north Norfolk, including much of Cromer.

Young Robert, 38, is well known in the town. Having been a commodity broker in the City, he took a serious interest in alcohol and cocaine and was almost jailed for two drink-driving offences. But now he is a reformed character and has discovered both Jesus and the satisfactions of property development – his van bears the inspiring legend, "Harbord Housing: God's Work in Progress."

The 11th Baron was helpful, giving him Harbord House, a nice pair of 1870s villas on the Overstrand road, plus contents. But money remained short and, in 2000, young Robert sold off most of the antiques and other artefacts, including his father's wartime medals. Dad was not best pleased.

That same year North Norfolk district council had to impose tree-preservation orders at Harbord House after complaints about tree-felling; and it also discovered that earth moving and the erection of additional structures had been going on without planning permission and that a large oriel window on the house had been removed.

Needless to say, Harbord House is in poor repair and its owner claims he needs £500,000 to "rescue" it. He therefore proposed to build new homes in the grounds, which are outside Cromer's development boundary. When this wheeze was refused permission, Harbord-Hamond proposed demolishing his home and replacing it with a block of four executive flats.

He may be short of cash, but Robert Harbord-Hamond thinks big. He is also a deeply concerned philanthropist. He claims – rightly – that Norfolk needs affordable housing for its indigenous population. So, in 2001, he proposed building "social housing" – 180 apartments – on the practice golf course south of Harbord House, an area designated as of high landscape value but which he also proposes as an ideal site for a new hospital.

When this was cruelly refused planning permission, he organised a "Housing Rally" to protest at the planning system which, he claims, only permits luxury homes. "Local planning consultants, along with our team, are liaising with the Prince of Wales Institute on the design," he wrote [having been a guest at HRH's wedding], "and are passionate about helping Cromer people." It is reported that about a dozen protesters turned up.

There is more. Harbord-Hamond proposes constructing a marina-harbour on the coast, either to the east or west of Cromer. This, he claims, will create 500 jobs, so must be a good thing. But he won't go ahead, he says, unless planning permission is given for his 400 "affordable homes" elsewhere. Who, if anyone, is his financial backer for the project is not clear. On a smaller scale, he also proposes demolishing Marine View, a charming unpretentious house on the Promenade partly dating from 1823 which, unfortunately, he owns.

At present, there are plans to regenerate the heart of Cromer by restoring the Edwardian character of the Promenade – helped by European money – yet Harbord-Hamond seriously proposes replacing Marine View with a large block of flats, despite having insinuated himself as a member of the Seafront Development Panel. His proposal can only further spoil Cromer.

Robert Harbord-Hamond is at least plausible. The local MP, Norman Lamb (Lib Dem), has taken up his cause and is calling for a review of the planning system. Other local landowners sympathise; why, if they are allowed to build houses on their estates then they, too, can "rescue" their expensive, dilapidated country houses. And affordable housing is such a good idea: after all, once permission is given, it can easily be turned into housing that only wealthy incomers and holidaymakers can afford.

There is no doubt that poor, rundown Cromer needs help. Improving the railway line to Norwich could work wonders, as could a sympathetic revamp of the splendid but sad Hotel de Paris, a fine late Victorian pile overlooking the pier which "Tum Tum" used to like to visit. What the town certainly does not need are the over-ambitious altruistic interventions of a greedy reformed drug addict who thinks he owns the place.

IN Eye 1067 I reported how Runnymede council had given permission for the demolition of Greenside, a fine pioneer Modern Movement house at Wentworth, in defiance of official guidelines over the treatment of listed buildings. The decision, in principle, affected not just 1930s houses but the security of all listed buildings. I'm happy to report that when the Twentieth Century took Runnymede's decision to judicial review, the council backed down. Hooray! As the owner clearly doesn't like his house, I hope he will now be obliged to sell it to someone who does.

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

I-SPY *Chengda, China*

Submitted by Stuart MacFarlane. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs.)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

NOT LONG ago this column drew attention to the quiet, behind-the-scenes deal struck between choreographer Matthew Bourne and the assistant general-secretary of the Musicians Union, allowing Bourne to tour his commercially successful *Nutcracker* with no orchestra but merely a taped accompaniment.

MU members were, to say the least, upset when they learnt what had been agreed and unimpressed by Bourne's insistence that the tour was only viable with taped music. They'll be even more upset to learn how much Bourne is making from the tour – a profit handsomely enhanced by the fact that although *Nutcracker*'s London run at Sadler's Wells *did* have an orchestra, it was paid at pitifully low rates.

The figures make interesting reading. For the 11-week season at the Wells the show took roughly £2.2m which, with estimated costs of £890,000, leaves more than £1.3m: a profit of 147%. For the tour, which has just begun, the estimated weekly takings are at the very least £100,000 (in a bad week) against costs of £74,400, which leaves £25,600. A minimum profit of 34.5 percent. And even if the tour had used an orchestra, there would still have been a minimum weekly profit of £15,900. Which is 19 percent.

That *Nutcracker* is so wonderfully profitable – and recouped its upfront capital outlay of £1m during the first six weeks of its London run – might be good news for the dance world; but it's done nothing for the mortgages of orchestral players. And it begs the question: why has such a money-spinner received £225,000 from the Arts Council? Will Mr Bourne be giving some of the money back? Or perhaps he's saving it to make a donation to the Musicians Benevolent Fund…

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Warballs

"*Othello and the Racial Question.* Professor Ania Loomba (University of Illinois and author of *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism*) touches on how, after the events of 11 September, it is especially important to trace the way in which religion fed into the construction of racial 'otherness' in Shakespeare's day."

— Programme for Bath Shakespeare Festival.

"Al Qaeda Threat Puts Spotlight on Garden Plants."

— Headline in *Garden News*.

"Problems surfaced, though. At first, there were concerns from local pressure groups about Gazza's past, particularly the time he had hit Sheryl. 'This was Washington DC and it was a time when everyone was still very much on edge after 11 September and there were all sorts of rumblings from political groups,' Hudson recalls."

— Profile of Paul Gascoigne in *Observer Sport Monthly*.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

STILL no news from the mentalist Raelians on their cloned baby. Apparently "Eve" lives in Israel and her parents don't want to submit her to DNA tests. Surprise, surprise.

Still, hats off to the so-called "Rael" and his mates in one respect: they managed to dupe the media into giving their bizarre sect tens of thousands of column inches (and days of airtime) in free publicity.

Features editors commissioned tiresome cliché-smiths to opine on the evils of "playing god", and the ludicrous Dr Patrick Dixon, a pious anti-cloning rent-a-quote, got his name in the papers and his face on the Beeb (whose science unit really should know better) again predicting that the cloning breakthrough-that-wasn't was the end of civilisation as we know it.

"I don't see any reason to doubt it whatsoever," he was quoted as saying. Er, no reason at all Patrick.

BRITAIN's attempt to stagger on to the information superhighway (what a quaint term that now seems) continues in farcical vein.

After revelations that BT's use-it-all-you-want internet services can be anything-but, now cableco NTL has decided to restrict its broadband customers to one gigabyte a day. A roar of protest from customers has forced NTL on to the back foot, explaining in detail what the changes mean, claiming, erroneously, that one Gb is equal to "10,000 pictures". It is, but only if the pictures are grainy thumbnails and not of publishable quality.

The biggest sod-you element to the whole thing is that customers who opt for the fastest service – by paying more – have the same limit imposed.

'Boffin'

"Stand back – let it breathe!"

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Is 25-34 the new youth?"
— Janet Street-Porter, *Radio Times*.

"Why 40 is the new 30."
— *Evening Standard*.

"Now that 60 is the new 40..."
— Suzi Godson, *Independent on Sunday*.

"Why biography is the new fiction."
— Bonnie Greer, *Mail on Sunday*.

"History is the new sex."
— Deirdre Fernand, *Sunday Times Magazine*.

"Prague has become the new Dublin."
— Gavin Esler, *The Scotsman*.

"Is poetry the new Prozac?"
— *Radio Times*.

"Is pink the new blue?"
— *Evening Standard*.

Pseuds Corner

We don't want to be confronted by a black man going white. We don't like this theatricalising of the subconscious wish of western imperialism...

ROS COWARD
(on the trials of Michael Jackson)
Guardian

It arrives with the subtle, perfected force of a swan...The great satisfaction to the reader in this prose bears some resemblance to walking in nature, falling in love, conversation and the spring-cleaning of memory, among many other things...The writing is so quick, easy and true that you want to feel it, like those classical birds pecking at the painted grapes.

CANDIA MCWILLIAM (reviewing Janet Davey's English Correspondence)
Evening Standard

By a strange coincidence both of my children married descendants of Chancellors of the Exchequer and of Edwardian novelists who were friends of Henry James – different Chancellors and different novelists. How could that not influence the grandchildren, both in terms of genes and of our mildly post-puritan family culture?

WILLIAM REES-MOGG
The Times

Judges at a competitive fencing bout are licensed hermeneuticists, their job to parse the grammar of flashing steel and to decide which hit lawfully landed first.

It is this essentially social and semantically pregnant nature of swordplay that explains why it still holds a fascination.

STEVEN POOLE (reviewing Richard Cohen's By the Sword)
Guardian

The first Vienna Vegetable Orchestra will be performing at the Purcell Room, London, on 18 and 19 February. On a variety of vegetable instruments including carrot flutes, celery bongos and a pumpkin drum, nine musicians and one cook will perform a menu of traditional African, classical European and electronic music...As the concert progresses, the instruments are gradually thrown into a large cooking pot and the finale is a large bowl of soup.

Classical Music

Pseuds Corporate

If we [the BBC] are to be as successful going forward as we have been in the past, we now need a set of clear values which articulate our purpose and vision, and which can be shared across the whole organisation. So today I am launching our values statement.

These values have not been imposed from above: they have emerged from the thoughts and feelings of over 10,000 staff from all parts of the BBC who attended the Just Imagine sessions. They belong to all of us...

GREG DYKE
Introduction to Our Values: One BBC

CONTRIBUTORS: Patrick West, Felix Benjamin, R. Morris, B.E. Wigg, Wes Gibbon, Everyone.

£10 paid for all entries

Letters

Private Eye

Golden fleece?

Sir,

With gold prices now at a six-year high (In The City, 1073), it seems hardly the action of a prudent man for the chancellor Mr Brown to have sold off a large proportion of our gold reserves some years ago (at a time when gold prices were at an all-time low). With the proceeds he bought lots of euros, not the strongest of currencies. Again, this does not seem very prudent.

I wonder how many "schools and hospitals" this has cost us?

Yours faithfully,
NICHOLAS M. WHEAR,
Dudley, W. Midlands.

Arabian gulf

Sir,

Much as I enjoy giving John Birt a kicking where one is deserved, you were wrong to accuse him (1073) of cravenly closing down BBC Arabic Television in the face of threats from Orbit. I was managing editor of the channel and can assure you it was Orbit, not the BBC, who closed it down. Because of Orbit's failure to get us to toe the official Saudi editorial line, it announced it no longer wanted the BBC and struck an agreement with BBC Worldwide for "an orderly wind-down" of the contract. Soon after though, without warning, it switched the service off. The BBC made desperate attempts to find an alternative partner to keep the channel alive, but none suitable could be found.

While it is true that the BBC trained all the editorial and production staff who later went off to launch Al Jazeera, the training was actually funded by Orbit. It is therefore a considerable irony that had Orbit not closed down BBC Arabic Television, flooding the jobs market with top-class Arab broadcasters, the Al Jazeera story might have been very different. And being a free-to-air channel, Al Jazeera has an audience that pay-to-view Orbit can only dream of.

IAN RICHARDSON,
Richardson Media Ltd, London.

Fuming

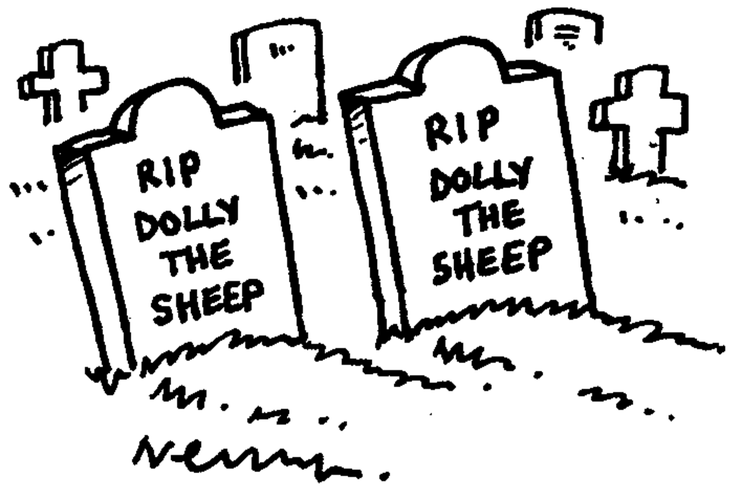
Sir,

The cartoon on page 9 (Man With Head In Oven, 1073) doesn't work. We finally stopped having "town gas" (distilled from coke and highly toxic) in 1977. The natural gas conversion program started in Burton-upon-Trent in 1967.

Natural gas is non-toxic both before and after combustion – it burns clean and doesn't produce sulphur dioxide or carbon monoxide with a well ventilated flame.

The only way to kill yourself with a modern gas oven is to allow the gas/air mixture to reach a dangerous level, then strike a match or produce a spark to ignite (explode) it.

Yours etc,
DOUGIE LAWSON,
Basingstoke.



Galling comments

Sir,

You describe (Brussels Sprouts, Eye 1072) the process by which Britain's application for membership of the EC (or Common Market as it was then known) was vetoed by that notorious French wishy-washy bleeding heart, President de Gaulle. You describe French farms of the period (40 years ago) as "...tiny, backward, peasant holdings, infinitely less productive than their British counterparts". Whilst not disputing the French wish to rig the CAP to protect their own, I wonder if the "productive" British farms mentioned could by any chance be related to the British farmers who for 40 years have been turning British food into the most chemical-filled, disease-ridden rubbish imaginable, or the same farmers who thought turning our countryside into a series of hedgeless, featureless wastelands was a good idea, or the same farmers who felt that feeding the dried, diseased brains of dead sheep to their (vegetarian) cattle might somehow help improve the quality of meat, milk and other bovine products. I won't bother mentioning battery chickens, salmon farms... The French may have rigged the market but they were right to be squeamish about the idea of a bunch of Barboured Brits forcing them out of business with factory production techniques and crap produce. Britain may realise one day that big is certainly not beautiful and may return to the "infinitely less productive" small farm methods that provide a continuous stream of reasonable quality produce. If there are any British farms left, that is...

JEREMY BOYCE,

Sauve, France.

Kebabed

Sir,

As an irresponsible adult whose mental outlook has barely moved forward since my student days two decades ago, I was excited by your mention of the NUS "Kebabthon" (sic) game in your last issue. A perfect waste of resources, I thought, and another fine diversion from work or studies. Imagine my disappointment, therefore, as I logged on to the website, to discover that Danny Timpson's Kebabathon is in fact a home office initiative aimed at reducing crimes against students. Presumably the folk at the NUS were too pickled on cheap cider to realise they were promoting such a lame and square campaign.

Yours,
MARK REYNOLDS,

London NW8.

Piloti wail

Sir,

As an avid follower of Nooks & Corners it is chastening to make its columns as a victim (1072). However, I cannot let the sweeping statement "architects are seldom interested in what people want" pass unchallenged. We may sometimes get it wrong, as Piloti delights in reminding us; but we do not forget that our greater duty is to the public, present and future.

GEORGE FERGUSON,

RIBA President Elect, Acanthus Ferguson Mann, Bristol.

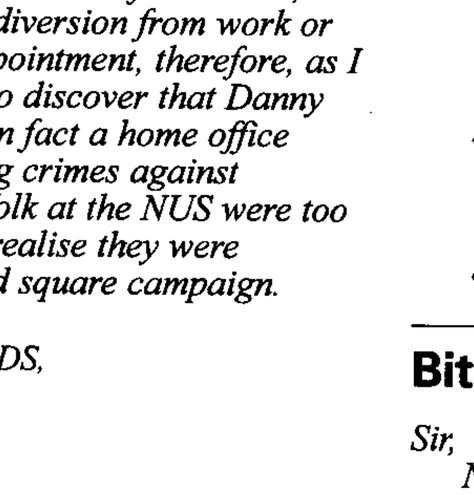
Lookalike

Sir,

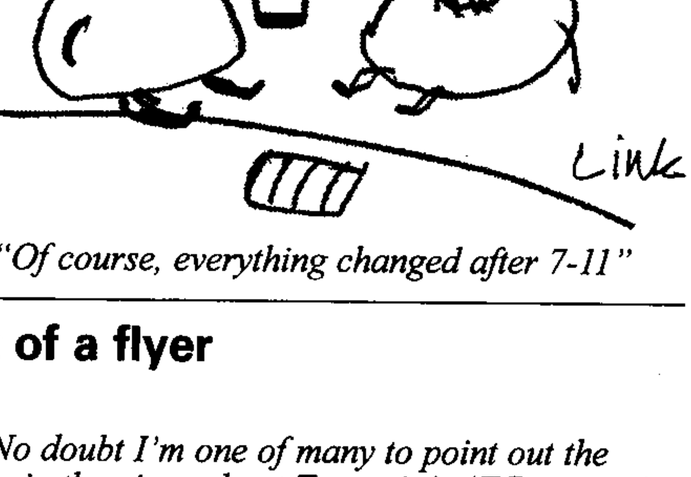
I am worried by the uncanny resemblance between US Secretary of State Colin Powell and Mictlantecuhtli, Aztec god of death. Are the Iraqis in even deeper trouble than they thought?

Yours faithfully,
ROBERT SOLOMON,

London NW3.



Powell



Aztec god

Argument demolished

Sir,

You know you're on to something when two Brighton councillors team up to deny that they are philistines. Well Cllr Lythell's remarks regarding the Essoldo building are rather odd considering what happened to it in recent history. It was originally a ballroom theatre, but to say it hadn't been used in that way since 1950 is plain wrong. As any local music fan will know, the Brighton Top Rank was a popular concert venue in the 1980s, and more recently it was squatted by the local group Justice? for a weekend conference to highlight the neglect of empty spaces. Much was made by the local paper the Evening Argus (known locally as the Evening Anus) of how these "dirty anarchists" had destroyed a listed building, but the occupiers left after a week and cleaned up after themselves. A local man who used to work there in the 1930s even turned up to praise the occupiers about their use of the building. However, shortly afterwards the place was boarded up and the inside totally gutted to accommodate a tacky leisure complex (of which there are no shortages in Brighton), leaving only the exterior as it was. It closed shortly afterwards leaving another derelict amusement arcade, which was of no other use. Perhaps that's why nobody wanted it, and it was later demolished!

Sincerely,
CHRIS BUNNY,

Via email.

"Of course, everything changed after 7-11"

Bit of a flyer

Sir,

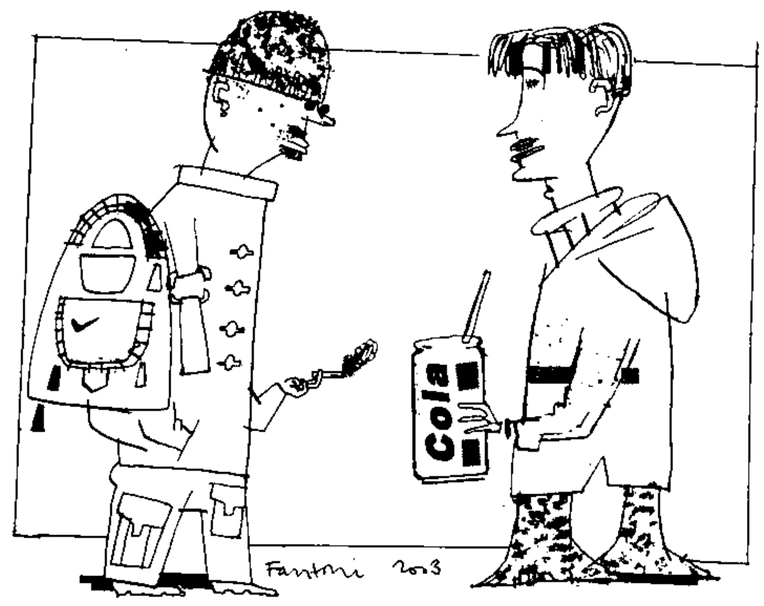
No doubt I'm one of many to point out the error in the piece about Tanzania's ATC system in your latest issue...

ICAO is the acronym of the International Civil Aviation Organization, a United Nations body, based in Montreal. It has no relationship to the World Bank (based in Washington, DC). The World Bank Group does not include an aviation wing, to coin a phrase; it might chuck away money on the Third World but it's sure to keep well away from the black hole of the world of civil aviation.

Hope this was suitably boring,
PETER TALLON,

Geneva.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Can you stop replying 'cool' to whatever I say?"

Bum notes

Sir,

It gives me no pleasure to take Private Eye to task. Your ill-informed article on Mark-Anthony Turnage in the recent edition, under Music & Musicians, is so subjective and petty that one wonders where O'Boulez has been truffling for his information. You may wish to consider the following:

- *Mark had been with Schotts for 20 years. His contract with them has now legally expired. Surely, he is as entitled as anyone else to renew his contract with whoever he considers will act in his best interest as a responsible partner in the development of his internationally acknowledged musical career. Schotts is no longer his first choice.*

You mention that Sally Groves has "single-handledly" steered Mark's career throughout. To infer that Mark-Anthony Turnage owes his success to anyone other than himself, or to another single individual, is beyond credibility.

- *Schotts take a hefty percentage of Mark's earnings up-front. If his work is performed in Germany, a further percentage is deducted. When you carelessly use the word "greed" in your article, you may wish to consider this.*
- *The recent Barbican venue was, as you correctly said, hosted by the BBC. As their composer-in-residence, Mark would logically have been their first choice. It was also an opportunity for the BBC to achieve the cultural high ground and present a superb performance of Mark's work, both past and present. It is risible to claim that Sally Groves had any major influence in this.*

Yours,
THE MACLARENS,

Torrevieja, Spain.

Currying favour

Sir,

While it's good to see Lord Gnome recognising television programmes made and broadcast outside London (HTV West's "Currie Night", Eye 1073), it would be better if he first checked his facts.

For the record:

- *the show's audience has grown significantly since it began. It stands now just two points behind the average achieved by other regional programmes playing on ITV at the same time;*
- *there are two researchers working on the programme, both employed on well-paid, long-term contracts;*
- *the programme does employ runners, paid between £50 and £60 a day;*
- *and, yes, "Currie Night" operates a work experience programme offering media graduates short attachments. The work experiencers aren't needed to produce the show; it's simply a way of helping young people to get started in a highly competitive business.*

Yours sincerely,
JAMES GARRETT,

Head of Features & Current Affairs, HTV West, Bristol.

Goad to Damascus

Sir,

In response to your "Letter from Damascus" (1072), I am disappointed to report that Ibrahim Hamidi remains a guest of the Syrian security services and that he was not released after a couple of weeks as stated. Sadly, all indications are that he will remain imprisoned for some time to come.

Ibrahim was a popular member of the Damascus journalistic and expatriate community – playing football and tennis with them regularly. Surprising then that after his arrest most of them didn't want to know of his plight and mumbled that "he had it coming" – nice to know that you can count on your friends!

Thankfully it seems that at last something is being done, and there are assurances from the British embassy that they are actively discussing the issue with the Syrian PM and it is said that the EU countries went together with a signed petition for his release. Whether this comes to anything, or whether the principals of journalistic freedom rank higher than not upsetting the Syrian government, or hindering a business opportunity, remains to be seen.

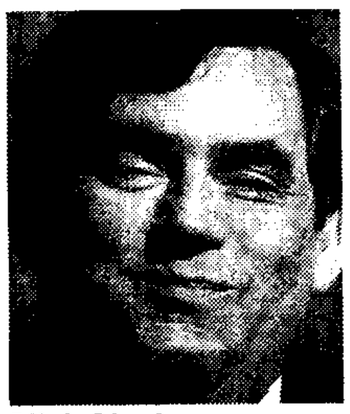
It is clear that the Syrian government now has a path to choose: living up to its position on the board of the UN high commission for human rights (and ratifying outstanding treaties and conventions) or to just continue with business as usual, by abducting thinking, progressive and self-expressive people, and abusing power by draining the economy.

Western governments also need to make a choice: continue to turn a blind eye to Syria's failings (eg the large numbers of Kurdish refugees in Syria without legal status) in return for Syria's support in The War Against Terror (T.W.A.T.) or to stand up for the liberty and freedom that the west supposedly cares about so much.

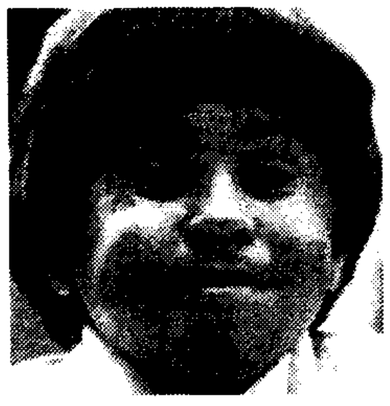
Yours sincerely,
MARK LOVE,

Via email.

Lookalike



Nick Nack



Brown

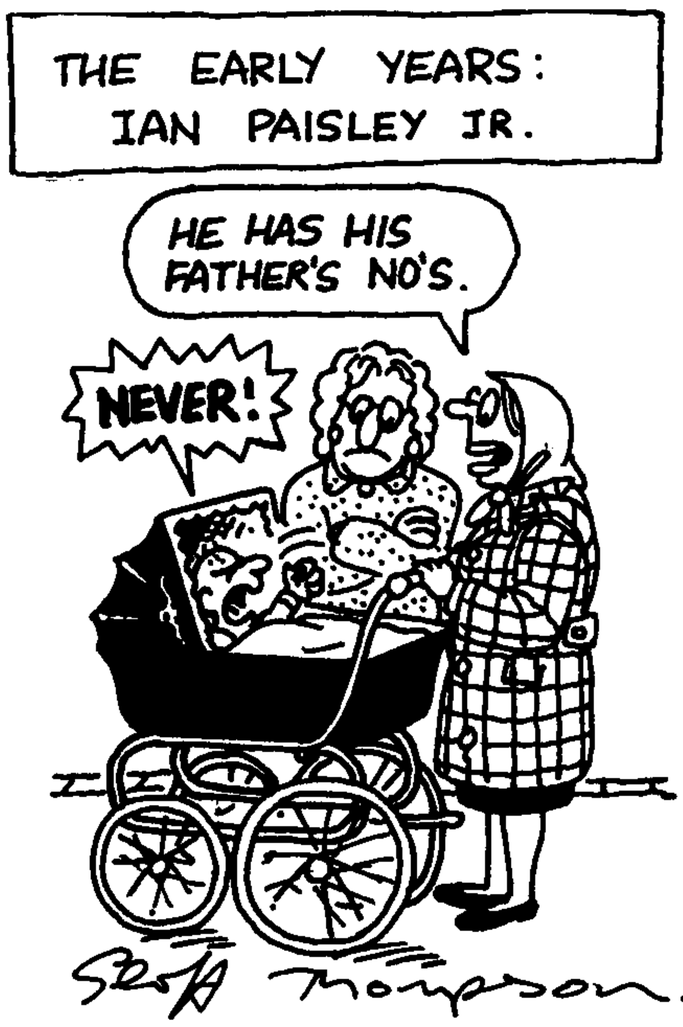
Sir,

I have noticed an unsettling similarity between the Rt Honourable Gordon Brown MP, and the late Herve Villechaize – best known for his role as "Nick Nack" in the James Bond film "The Man with the Golden Gun". Is it possible they're related, and if so, who is playing the role of Mr Scaramanga?

I think we should be told.?

Yours faithfully,
MURRAY TAYLOR,

Essex.



Witan wisdom

Sir,

Page 4: Story castigating Witan Investment Trust for woeful performance and the buying of friendly hacks.

Page 2: Full page ad for... Witan Investment Trust.

Easy to spot the hand that feeds Lord Strobes. It's the one with all the bitemarks.

Pip Pip!

DANIEL ADLER,

Farnham, Surrey.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"This game was another rung on the ladder of the learning curve."
JOHN EMBUREY, Sky Sports
(Tony Dallman)

"It's two immovable objects clashing together..."
STEVE DAVIS, BBC2
(P.G.M. Tripp)

"If you take your foot off the pedal and treat the game with contempt, then the balls have a habit of jumping up and kicking you in the teeth."
JOHN VIRGO, BBC2
(Rikki Blue)

"Klusener holds that bat like a piece of wood..."
HENRY BLOFELD, Radio 4
(Reuben Frankau)

".I've been asked that question for the last six months. It is not fair to expect me to make such a fast decision on something that has been put upon me like that."
TERRY VENABLES
(Albion Gray)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

MANY OF MY CLIENTS ARE VERY POOR.
LAW COURT
SO, DO YOU DO CHARITY WORK?
URT
NOT EXACTLY. THEY WEREN'T POOR BEFORE THEY ENGAGED ME.

Letter from **Caracas**

from Our Own Correspondent

ANYWHERE else in the world, politicians who led a disastrous two-month general strike which wrecked their country's main industry, bankrupted thousands of businesses, threw half a million out of work and plunged the economy into its deepest depression in history – without achieving any of their objectives – would now be out of a job.

But this is Venezuela, where being an opposition leader means never having to say you're sorry. You may remember our great leader, Lt Col Hugo Chavez (ret), leader of a failed coup in 1992, subsequently reincarnated as an elected president. We're very sorry we elected him (twice!) and we promise never to do it again. But please can we have our country back?

Given this lunatic's disastrous record over the past four years – the self-appointed socialist loves the poor so much he has done his best to increase their numbers and sharpen their plight by cutting most social programmes, save those run by the military – you might think he'd be easy to oust.

But you'd be reckoning without our opposition. We long-suffering Venezuelans have marched the equivalent of the circumference of the globe since early December armed with flags, whistles and anti-Chavez placards. We've been attacked with rocks, bottles, tear gas and bullets. We've even spent the night on the motorway that runs through Caracas. At 6.30pm every day our leaders (henceforth known as: "the aerobics instructors") would give us the details for the next day's march.

We've gone without petrol, beer, milk, meat and cooking gas. We've kept our children home from school. We gave up Christmas. Those of us with businesses have seen decades of work go down the drain. The net result: Chavez now controls not only the army (we handed that to him by staging a failed coup last April, which allowed him to purge dissident generals) but also the crucial oil industry, whose rebel managers have now been sacked.

He has announced exchange controls and declared that only true patriots (ie his followers) will have access to dollars. That gurgling sound is the entire Venezuelan private sector disappearing down the toilet. The man in the red beret and the camouflage fatigues is shedding no tears: what he calls "the oligarchs" have done him the favour of committing what one of our unlamented past presidents once called a "self-suicide". Those still standing despite government economic policy and the opposition's strike will be felled by the foreign exchange famine.

Hugo, meanwhile, is close to putting a stranglehold on the opposition press which – dire as it is – is our only remaining defence against back-to-back, simultaneous broadcasts on all channels of the Dear Leader's childhood reminiscences, revolutionary rants and – God help us! – singing. We used to be the world's fifth biggest oil exporter. Now we import petrol. In some parts of the country queues at filling stations are more than 1,000 vehicles long, and some cars have been in line for a fortnight.

Given that the nutcase is still occupying the presidential palace, it is hard to dress all this up as a rousing success story. But our forgettable opposition leaders, not a single one of whom deserves to chair a condominium association, let alone run a country, insist they have achieved their objectives. "Look," they proudly boast, "at all the countries that have now noticed we have a problem and come rushing to our aid."

It's true Cesar Gaviria, the Colombian secretary-general of the Organisation of American States, has been here so long he's starting to talk with a Venezuelan accent. And his valiant but fruitless efforts to achieve a peaceful solution are backed by everyone from the Pope to the European Union. But much more of this kind of opposition and we'll all be building styrofoam-and-car-tyre rafts… and checking the winds and currents between here and Miami.

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

And that's a very brief hullo this week, because I am extremely busy trying to save the world and, frankly, the views of the parishioners of St Albion's are pretty low on my agenda at the moment.

I know that a few of you wasted your Saturday parading up and down the high street with silly placards saying "Down with the Vicar" and "Not in our parish". But, frankly, the truth is that a lot more people *didn't* go on any marches than did. And that proves that most people in the parish support the Vicar 100%.

But, as for those few misguided souls who had nothing better to do than go on the march, I have only this to say:

Don't get me wrong. I hear what you're saying. It's just that you're wrong.

Do I need to say that again?

Yes, I do. WRONG. Wrong, wrong, wrong.

I'm hearing *you*, but are you hearing *me*?

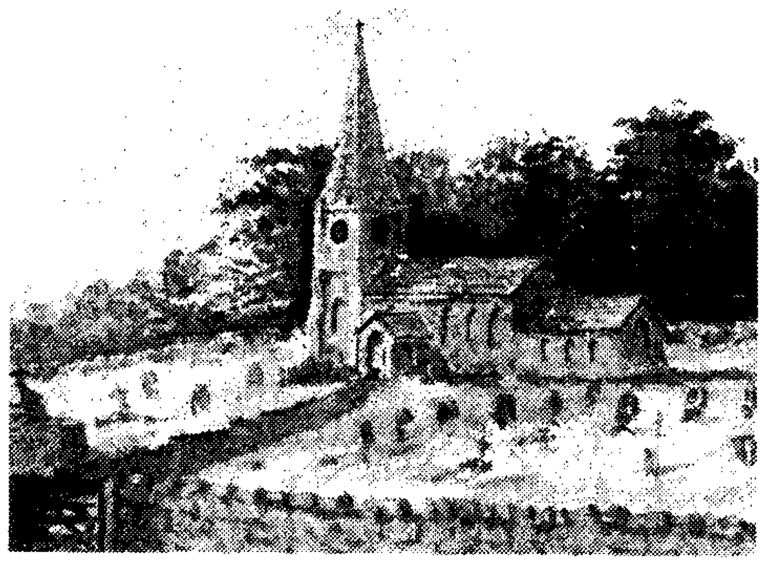
Let's not forget the story from the Good Book about the "one righteous man" and the millions of foolish virgins who went on a march, then fell off a cliff and were drowned.

I can't give you chapter and verse at the moment, because I'm so busy. But it's there somewhere, and Mr Campbell tells me he is going to to put it on the vicarage website as soon as one of his junior staff has tracked it down from the Book of Google.

The message I'm still trying to put across to everyone in the parish is quite simple. The reason why we must all join together in the great crusade against the evil one is:

1. Because I say so.
2. Because I'm right.
3. Because as your vicar I have a direct line to the Supreme Being who rules all our lives (i.e. The Rev. Dubya) and he says so too!

And for those of us who have lately been "having doubts", and find it hard to believe in the existence of such a Supreme Being,



all I can say is, "Dubya moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to unfold", and it is certainly not up to us to question anything he ever says about anything at all!

Have you got that? Do I make myself clear? And if I don't, so what?

I DON'T CARE what any of you think! Not you, Mr Dalyell, not you, Mrs Jackson, not you, Mr Benn, and certainly not the small minority of a million or so parishioners who went on the silly march.

And, as for those members of the PCC like Mr Cook who go around the parish parading their consciences and trying to read me moral lectures, all I can suggest, Robin, without getting too personal, is that you try having a look at your own moral record first!

I am talking about you and Gaynor and what went on in the organ loft all those years ago!

Not exactly the best qualification for telling me how to behave!

So there we are. I know what I am doing is right, and that's all that matters.

That's why I've written a special chorus, to be sung at this week's One-Parent Family Communion.

"You are wrong
And I am right.
That's my song
So now let's fight!"

(Words and music arranged by T. Blair with the permission of Rev. Dubya Bush, Director of Music of the Latter-Day Morons Tabernacle Choir)

Yours,

Tony

A Note From Our Parish Treasurer, Mr Brown

A recent study of the parish accounts indicates a likely shortfall on parish giving this year due to circumstances beyond the treasurer's control – i.e. the cost of the vicar's absurd crusade against the Evil One, which of course I totally support. For this reason, I am asking parishioners to dig deeper into their pockets to pay just that little bit extra (£1 billion) to finance his crazy adventure. G.B.

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

Even though I am not a member of your congregation, could I please use your columns to express my admiration for your vicar. I so applaud his courage in the face of criticism, his determination to stand up for what he believes in, his lovely smile and his plum-coloured trousers.

Yours sincerely,
Michael Portillo,
The Old Thatch, Safeway Lane.

The Editor reserves the right to print in full all letters sucking up to the vicar.

Dear Sir,

I have been asked by the vicar to point out what a tremendous job he is doing in these difficult times. He needs all the support he can get, particularly from those to whom he may shortly be giving a job.

Yours,
P. Mandelson
Sole proprietor 'The Handy Mandy' Odd-Job Agency ("no job too humiliating"), Hinduja Mansions.

The Editor reserves the right to print in full all letters which the vicar has commissioned, even if they are from someone as untrustworthy as our former churchwarden. A.C.

Thought For The Week

Too many parishioners waste their valuable evenings watching rubbish on television, instead of making boots and knitting tanks for our boys in the Gulf. One particular programme which is not worth watching is on this Thursday and will show Carole Caplin, a friend of the Vicar's wife, saying a number of things which she now regrets and acknowledges are not true. I would be very disappointed if I heard any parishioners discussing this pointless programme over coffee during our "Women For War" meeting on Sunday – speakers Mrs Jowell, Mrs Beckett and Mrs Harman, if she can get to the church without being arrested for driving at 99 mph! This meeting will replace the scheduled talk by Mr Benn "My Very Important Visit To Iraq" (with slides and tape recordings), which has had to be cancelled due to lack of interest.

Parable for the Week: **The Good Rich Man**

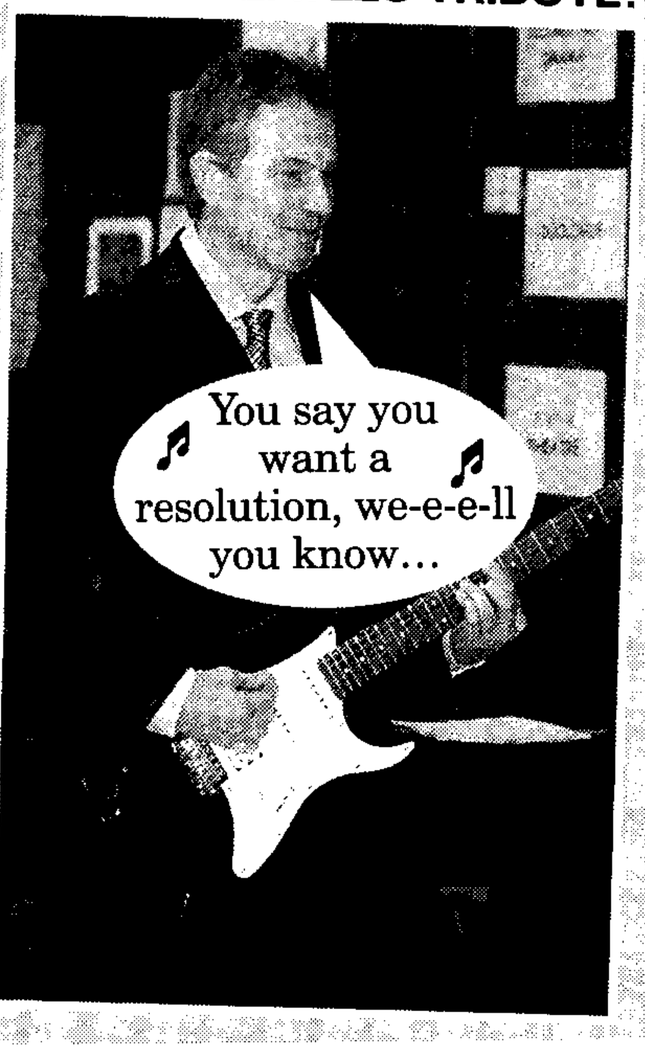
There was once a lawyer whose name was Lairg. And he was very rich. And he then arranged that he would become even richer. But there were those who, speaking with envy, said amongst themselves, and even unto the Daily Mail, "It is outrageous. For why should it be given to the Lord Lairg even an hundredfold, when the other labourers in the vineyard are to receive only a measly 2.9 percent?" And then, when the people waxed wroth, the Lord took counsel and proclaimed "I shall forgo my just reward because verily I have been rumbled." And the people heard what the Lord Lairg said and praised him, saying, "Behold, what a good and saintly figure he is."

Moral: *It is easier for a rich man to get away with it than for a poor man to get into the Garrick Club.*

Parish Scrapbook

VICAR'S PROTEST SONG!

TONY'S BEATLES TRIBUTE!



MR BLUNKETT SHOWS HIS SUPPORT

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"It's inevitable that professionals who deal with issues of life and death will make a few jokes now and again," defence lawyer Sarah Ottinger told reporters in New Orleans, "but taking that humour out of the office and into the courtroom is another story. It's a solemn event when the state decides that they want to kill one of their citizens, and to be cute and flippant about it is clearly wrong."

Ottinger was speaking after prosecutors in Jefferson Parish (a suburb of New Orleans) had repeatedly conducted murder trials while wearing neckties with swinging nooses on them. "I couldn't believe my eyes," said Lawrence Jacobs, whose son was being tried on capital murder charges. "I walked into the courtroom, and there were two prosecutors wearing ghoulish ties, one with a dangling noose, the other with an image of the Grim Reaper. That's when it really hit me. These guys are out to kill my son, and they're making light of it."

Jacobs' defence lawyers had to file a motion "to prohibit prosecutors from wearing tasteless and improper garb in the courthouse" before the prosecutors agreed to remove them, but such behaviour is not uncommon in Louisiana. "Until recently, prosecution lawyers used to celebrate lethal injections by giving each other plaques decorated with hypodermic needles," one defence lawyer confided, "and they still celebrate death sentences with office parties."

Commenting on such behaviour, Mr Jacobs observed "these prosecution guys with their ties act like death is a joke, yet they're the ones calling my son a cold-blooded killer. And that's what's really crazy." *(Chronicle Herald [Nova Scotia], 5/1/2003. Spotter: Wallace Brown)*

—o—

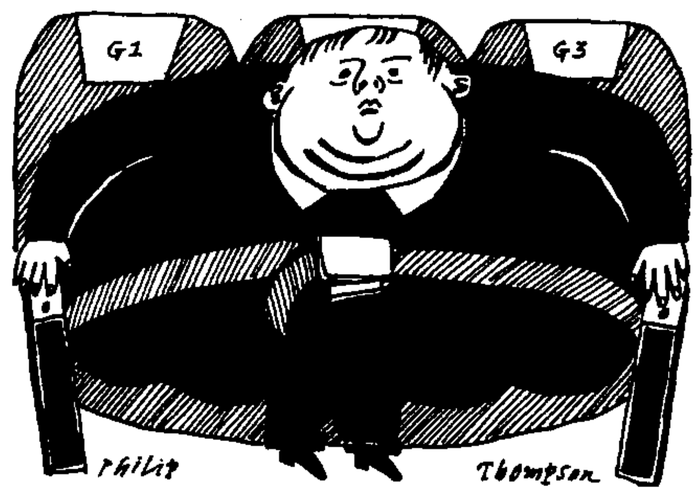
"It's a good gift for me," Kunja Bihari Mahato told reporters in Bankura, north-west of Calcutta, "and I am very happy. Now I can dump my rusty and ramshackle old bicycle which was bought by my father forty years ago, and ride this smart new bicycle instead. A little snip is a small price to pay for such a splendid machine."

Mahato, a farm hand and father of four children, was one of twenty-four men who had just taken part in a local government scheme entitled "Undergo vasectomy and pedal away on a deluxe new bicycle with silver bell and cycle clips." Despite objections from some politicians, a district administration official defended the scheme, saying "it will be difficult to raise the majority of Indians above the poverty level if we do not curb population growth now, so we are taking decisive action. Last winter, when we first offered vasectomies to the local population, we offered a free goldfish bowl with every snip, but got a poor response, with very few men coming to our camps. So this year, we came up with the attractive idea of offering a new £20 bicycle and accessories in return for the operation, and it clicked. They are queueing up for vasectomies and bicycles, and we expect that many hundreds of men will have taken advantage of the offer by the time the winter is over." (Ananova, 23/1/03. Spotter: Stephen MacDonald)

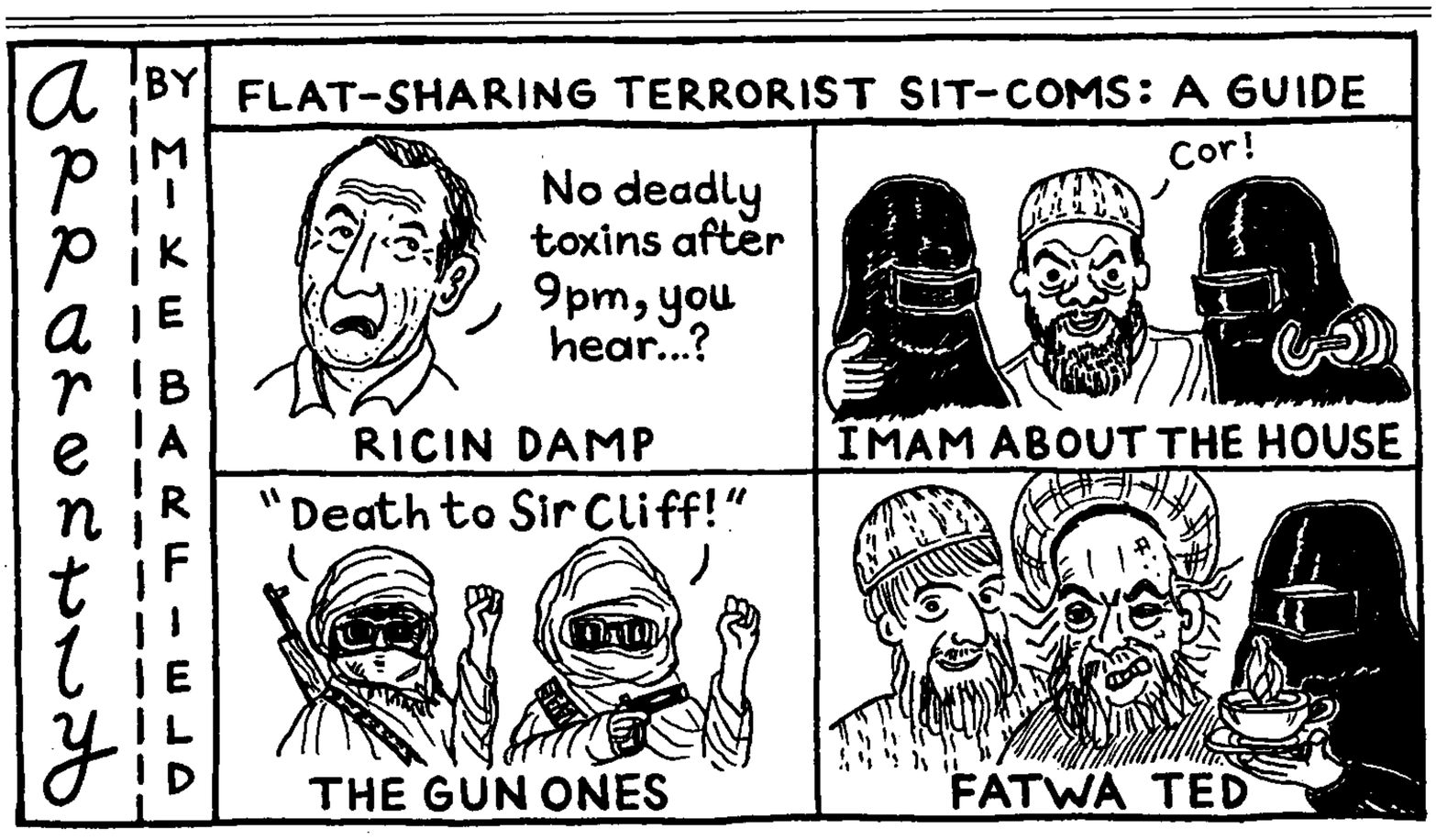
—o—

"Whenever an airplane takes off, it's trying to overcome gravity," Bill Yearwood told a press conference in Victoria, British Columbia, "and every pound makes a difference. The heavier the load, the more fuel you use, which makes things more expensive, and more dangerous too. The airline industry has always imposed surcharges on overweight baggage, so why shouldn't it impose surcharges on overweight people too?"

Yearwood, regional manager for the Transportation Safety Board in B.C., was speaking about plans to start weighing all passengers on commuter flights, and charging them extra if they exceed the standard limit. "We have to face facts. The industry assumes that all adults weigh 180 pounds, but in reality 60% of Americans and Canadians are overweight, and 30% are obese. In a large aircraft like a Boeing 747, that doesn't really matter, because the fuel weighs far more than the passengers, but on smaller planes it can make



a huge difference. We think that excess weight caused by the presence of large-statured people may have played a part in several recent crashes, so we really need to start weighing passengers. That way, if several obese people are on a flight, they can be distributed throughout the plane, so they don't affect the centre of gravity, or empty seats can be left. But those empty seats have to be paid for, and a surcharge seems the fairest way. And even though obese people will have to pay more, thin people can be offered discounts, so what better encouragement could there be to go on a diet?" *(Vancouver Sun, 29/1/2003. Spotter: Tim Whelan)*



Exclusive to all newspapers

THAT HISTORIC PEACE MARCH

by **Phil Space**, Our Reporter
On The Spot (In Front Of His Television)

AND still they come. A swathe of humanity marching slowly through the capital... bitterly cold day... old and young together... middle England... man playing the accordion... multiplicity of banners... old soldier with his dog... muslim women smiling through veils... tide of human protest... good-humoured crowds... and still they come... people from all across the nation... SWP and Countryside Alliance... first-time demonstrators and old hands... pouring in from assembly points... man in a kilt... and still they come *(continued p. 94)*

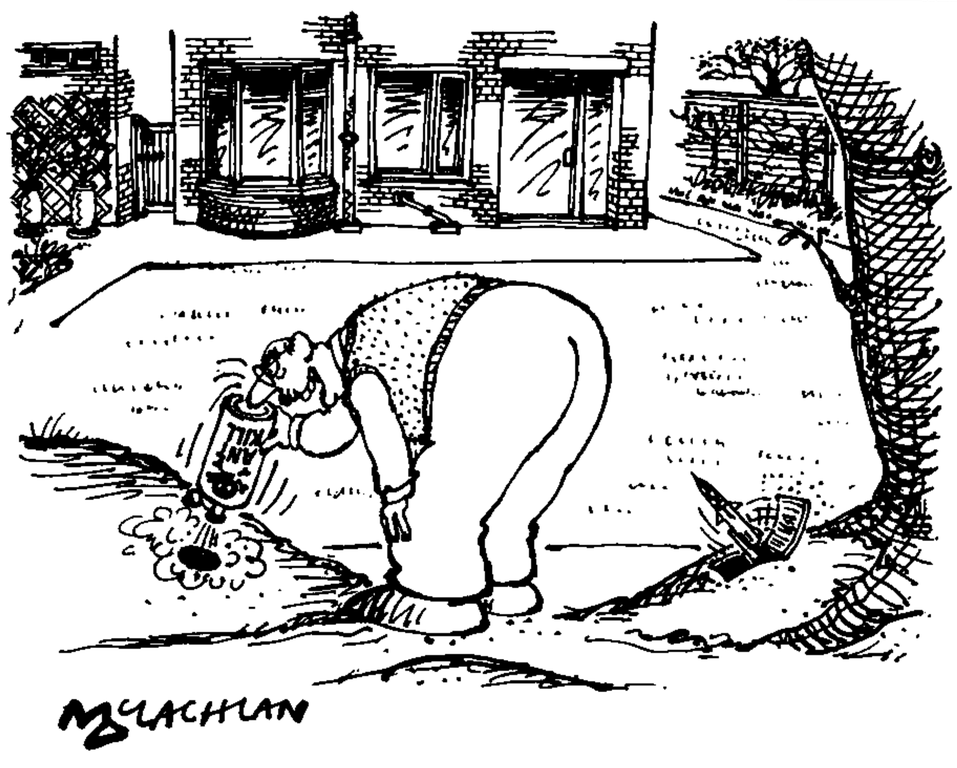
That Smoking Tape In Full

The Final Proof That Saddam Is In League With Al Qaeda

Osama bin Laden *(for it is possibly he)*: That Saddam – what a bastard. Doesn't believe in Islam? Bloody infidel! Do you know what I'd do to him? String 'im up! It's the only language he understands. Socialist scum.

I had that George Bush in the back of my cave once. But I got away. A very stupid man.

© Al Cabeera, the TV station that taxi drivers trust.



"Okay, my little friends, if you're so bloody clever, let's see what you make of this lot"

"It's okay, I'm on the guest list"

REID DEFENDS 'TERROR WARNING'

by Our Home Affairs Correspondent **Barry Cryer-Wolff**

THE Labour Party chairman John Reid today defended his actions, despite widespread criticism that he was being sensational, when he warned the public on Tuesday that "the sky is falling down".

"I was acting on a specific warning given to me by Chicken Licken in the forest just a few minutes earlier," said a defiant Mr Reid. "Not to have passed this warning on would have been inexcusable."

Anti-terrorist police have confirmed that an acorn, possibly with North African roots, has been taken into custody in relation to this incident.

The BBC Iraq Debate

(Studio full of presenters and experts. Solemn music plays.)

Jeremy Vine: Now with Saddam refusing yet again to comply with the weapons inspectors, the big question on everyone's lips has to be 'Should I be wearing a tie?'

Military Expert: Well, the evidence is not conclusive and we cannot say for certain...

Jeremy Paxman: Come on – yes or no. Is this open-necked shirt-effect silly or not?

General: If I could come in there, I think the surveillance pictures show that...

Matt Frei: Surely it's good to look casual? You know – modern, 'with it', accessible, not too stuffy?

Admiral: The important issue is whether the link between Saddam Hussein and the Al-Qaeda terrorist network has been...

Jeremy Vine: You're avoiding the question, aren't you? What about a polo neck?

Jeremy Paxman: Or a polo shirt?

Matt Frei: What about a t-shirt? Or a sweatshirt? Or no shirt at all? Is that too casual?

Foreign Secretary: I fail to see what...

Jeremy Vine: I'm sorry, that's all we've got time for. If you have a view on the new BBC policy of casual dress code, you can email us on dumbdown@bbc.co.uk or text us on 073742845 or alternatively you can just forget it because it doesn't really matter.

(More solemn music. Credits.)

Exclusive to Private Eye and all other newspapers

Leading celebrities explain their differing stances on Bush's War.

RICK PEEBLE (Dave Smith in ITV's Paravets)

I AM totally against the war because it's just about oil, isn't it? And I'm against that, as a way of life.

HARVEY TURNUP
(Designer for The House of Turnup, Jermyn Street)

IF I was called up, I wouldn't go. People get killed in wars, you know. Everyone forgets that.

CINDY TOOTHBRUSH
(Fashion model)

I HATE Blair. You can't believe a word he says. And the whole thing's ridiculous to my mind. I'm against.

TRISH YOBB
(DJ on Radio One's Yobb Show)

AS A woman, I am totally against Bush's genocidal policy. War is never right, unless of course there is a second UN resolution.

RICKY CHEESE
(Alternative comedian and star of BBC3's new topical youth show, 'Hard Cheese')

BUSH? Adolf Bush? Right? Makes me sick. Right? Think about it.

NEW FROM LORD GNOME

★ *Hours Of Fun For All The Family!!!*

THE DIY TOP SECRET INTELLIGENCE DOSSIER KIT

(as advertised on TV by world-famous US Secretary of State COLIN POWELL)

NOW you too can astonish world opinion with your very own Top Secret Intelligence Dossier!

The kits include:
- **pair of scissors**
- **glue**
- **one hour's free internet access**
- **HMSO-style ring-binder**
- **Certificate of Verification from Alastair Campbell**

IT'S SO EASY! Just type in the words "secret", "Iraqi", "weapons" and "mass-destruction" and within seconds you can be downloading some of the world's top intelligence secrets, copied out of various US high school essays and an old copy of *Jane's Fighting Moustaches* (edited by F. Tusa).

Simply print out, cut 'n' paste, and, hey presto, you've convinced all the world of the necessity to go to war immediately.

Says GWB of Washington, "This is all I need to destroy the world."

Below are two examples of the amusing results that you can achieve with the Gnome "Home Dossier Kit".

The Al-Fayed militry complex, situated 15 kilometres west of Fuggiya, could well be the centre of production for the deadly biological nerve gas Gavascon. Some observers believe that the even more deadly virus ~~Anyusel~~ ANUSOL is manufactured at the sister plant Al-Koren just down the road. Sorry I didn't have time to finnish this essay, as my Mom and Pop wanted to take me to the Redsox v. Apaches. See you at my next tutorial!

The appartment block at 15 Saddam Street, just off the Hussain Boulevard, is known to be the world HQ of the Islamicist terror group KFC (believed to stand for "Kill Filthy Christians"). Behind a front of ~~smelling~~ selling chicken nuggets and frys, the staff are known to be highly-trained nuclear sientists linked to Al Qaeda through their shadowy leader Col. Sanders, who disguises himself by waring an Osama-style beard and a 10-gallon tea-towel on his head bearing the legend "Greetings from Damascus".
© University of New Dworkin Espionagological Studies Department.

From the pen that brought you Heir of Sorrows, La Dame Aux Camillas and Born To Be Queen, comes a special love story for Valentine's Day

NEVER TOO OLD

by Dame Sylvie Krin

THE STORY SO FAR: Multi-billionaire media mogul Rupert Murdoch has married a fragrant young oriental beauty from the land of birds nest soup.

Now read on..

"I GOT great news for you, Lupert," purred the lovely Wendy Deng, as she entered the gymnasium of their 48th storey Manhattan penthouse apartment.

"You mean you're going to switch off this bloody rowing contraption and give me an ice-cold tinnie?" puffed the sweating septuagenarian tycoon, as he tried to keep up with the machine's remorseless demands.

"First guess wrong," hissed his peach-skinned paramour, as she turned up the machine to 'Olympic Standard (Bronze) Level'.

"You mean, we've got the Sky Shopping Channel into Tibet?" he guessed with a wan smile, as golf-balls of sweat rolled off the walnut wrinkles of his fast-ageing face.

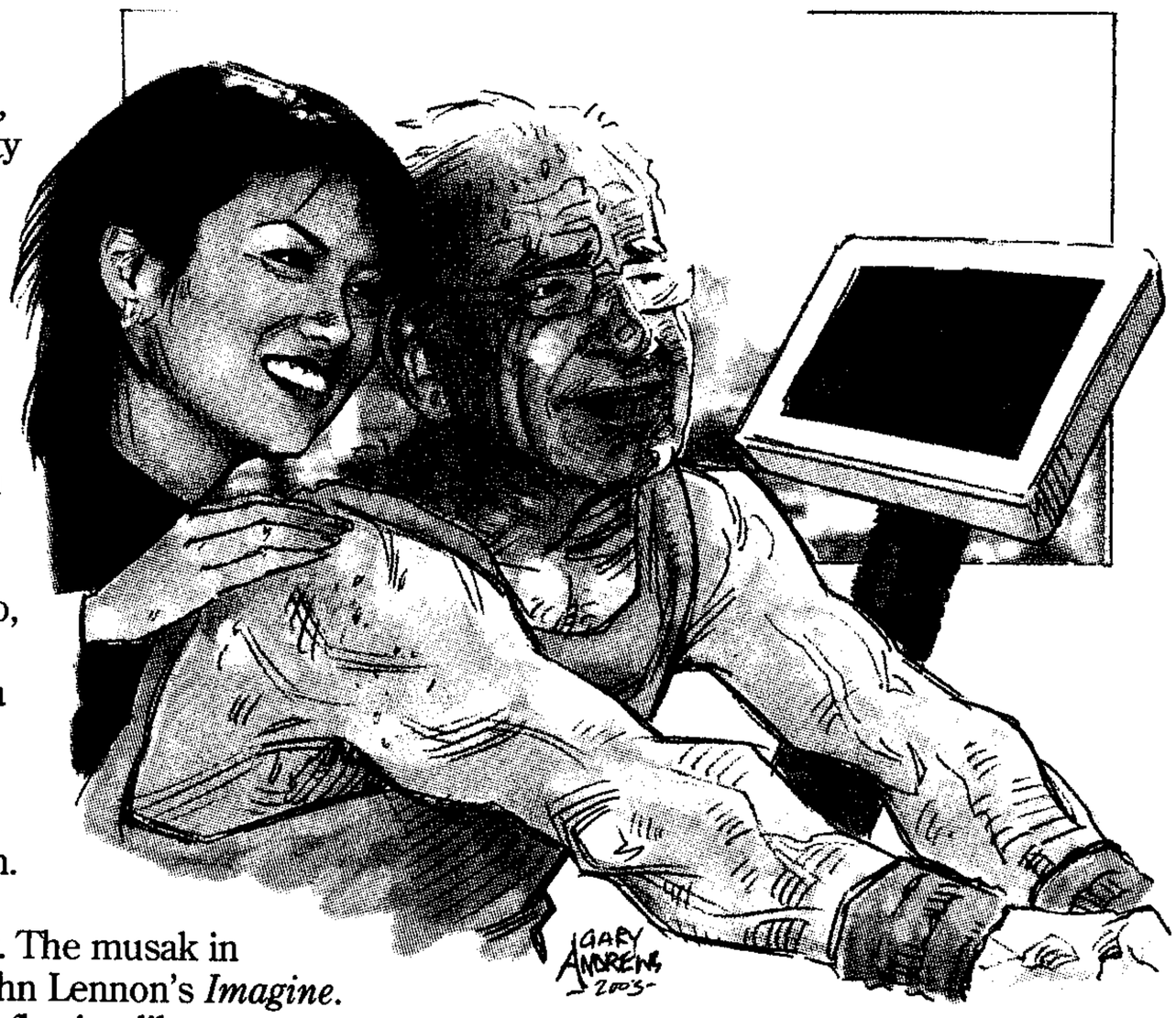
"Brilliant!"

"Wrong again, Lupert, you pretty dim sum for billionaire magnate."

"Steady on, sheila."

"My name Wendy, you silly old man. No, you remember what you were doing three months ago, that night in Kowloon Ramada Honeymoon Suite?"

Suddenly it all came back to him.



The velvet of the tropical night. The musak in the lift playing John Lennon's *Imagine*. The amber liquid flowing like water – cripes, he'd had a skinful that night.

And what was that stuff she'd put in his cocoa? Powdered rhino horn, she'd said – "ancient Chinese herbal remedy to put smile on face of tired old man".

Blimey, so that's what she was on about, he thought.

"Jeez, you don't mean you're up the duff again? You've only just popped one out. You'd think I was only firing blanks at my age."

"No, no," soothed the Manchurian mother-to-be from the land of crispy duck with plum sauce and pancakes, "you super-fertile hunky big boy. You number one jig-a-jig."

Letting go of the oars, he slumped forward on the machine and buried his head in his hands.

"God Almighty, Wend," he croaked. "You know what this is going to mean? More waking up at 3 in the morning. More sleepless nights. More pushing the buggy round Central Park. More of the little buggers climbing all over me when I'm trying to catch 40 winks between global video conferences."

He searched her doll-like porcelain visage for a trace of compassion. "You know what this will do to me, Wend, don't you? It'll kill me."

An inscrutable smile flickered across her cherry-red lips, as she turned the machine up to 'Steve Redgrave – Danger Level'.

Outside, black clouds were rolling up over the Manhattan skyline, plunging the city into night.

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Arts Council Rebrands

by Our Design Staff **Jennifer Logo**

THE ARTS Council Of England has commissioned a £70,000 redesign from top image consultants, Lambie Pamby.

They have decided to drop the words "of" and "the", so that their decision to spend £70,000 will be known as "complete waste money".

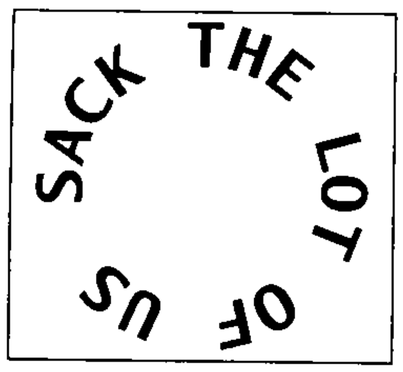
In an even more radical move, they have decided to change their name from the old-fashioned sounding "Arts Council England" to the more modern and contemporary "Arse Council".

"This really says everything about us," said a spokesman. "It really captures our ability to spend £70,000 for no reason."

THAT NEW LOGO

Before

After

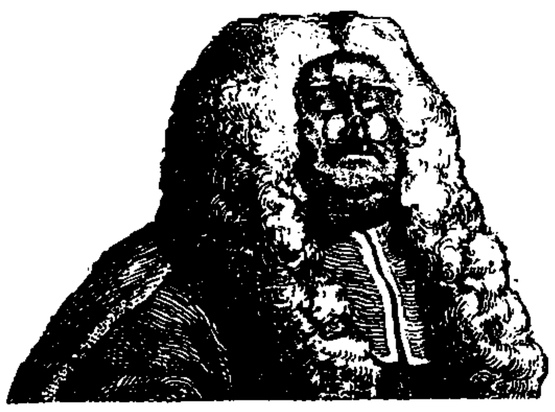


© Namby Pamby Ripoff plc.

U.S. INVOKES SPIRIT OF CHURCHILL

Old People's Home

"We're going to have to ask you to leave, Mr Lee – we've just found out you're only 38"



IN THE COURTS

Mr George Michael Douglas Fairbanks Jr and Her Royal Highness Princess Catherine Armstrong-Jones of Zeta v. *Hullo!* Magazine

Before Mr Justice Cocklecarrot

Day 94

Cocklecarrot: Your Highness, may I say what an honour it is that you should grace our humble courtroom with your writ. Not since last week, when we were privileged to have a video link with St John of Cleese, have I had such a famous person in the back of my court!

(Sycophantic laughter from 2000 assembled hacks.)

Would you like to sit down, Miss Jones, since you are not only very famous and beautiful, but also pregnant and the innocent victim of one of the gravest *scandala magnata* that has ever been perpetrated by the so-called gentlemen of the press.

Miss Zeta-Jones: You are too kind, your Worshipfulness.

(Takes seat offered by usher.)

Cocklecarrot: Mr Hugefee, pray explain to the court the circumstances of this dreadful case.

Sir Ephraim Hugefee QC *(for Miss Zebra-Crossing)*: Will you please tell the court what were your feelings when you first saw the photographs of your wedding in this shameless, disgusting and opprobrious publication viz. the *Hullo!* magazine.

Miss Zeta-Minus *(taking out Welsh onion [possibly leek])*: Sob. No words can describe my feelings of shock, horror, hurt, insult, umbrage, humiliation and outrage when I saw pictures of myself in my wedding dress in the magazine in question. What should have been the happiest day of my life had been cruelly violated and turned into a living nightmare which will haunt me to my dying day.

(Hacks break into spontaneous applause, judge weeps openly.)

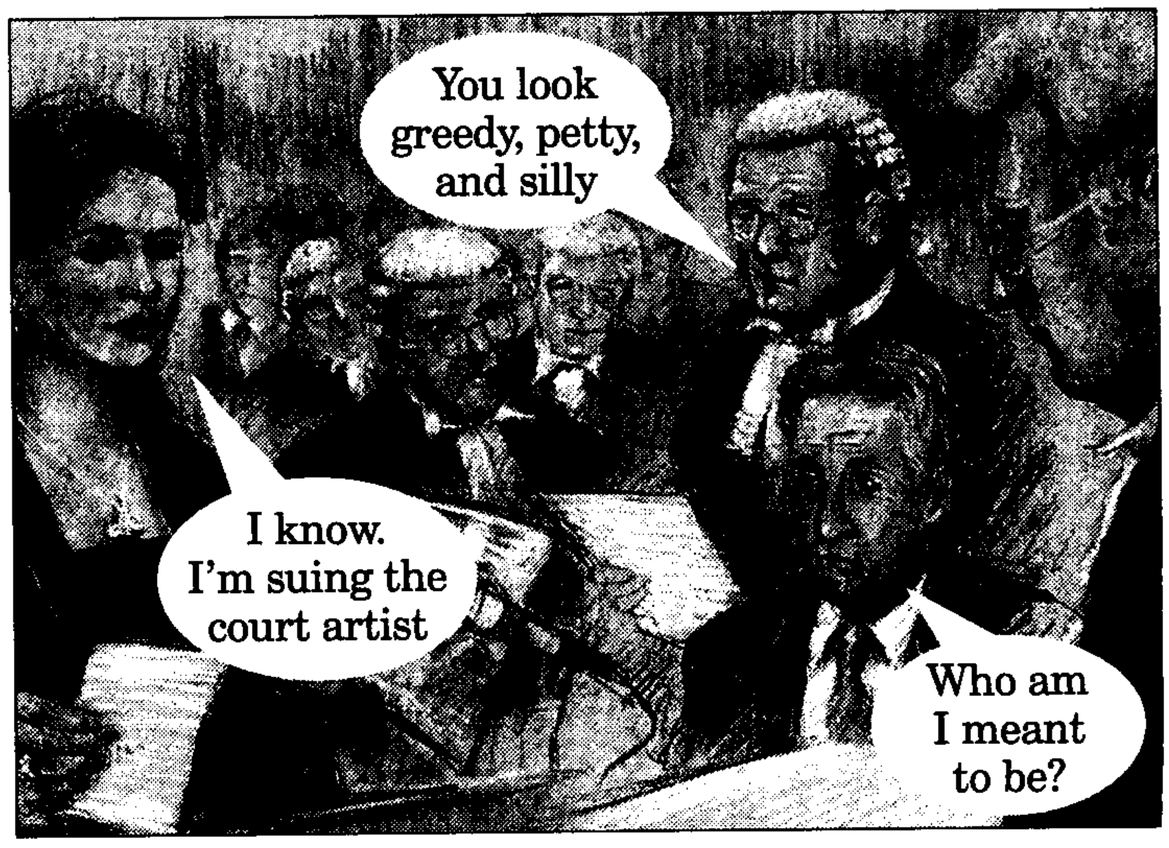
Was that alright, Michael? Or do you think I should have held back a bit at the beginning and then really milked it at the end. Shall I take it from the top?

Mr Michael Douglas *(for it is he)*: Darling, you were wonderful. Waddya say, judge, does the lady get an Oscar, or does she get an Oscar?

Mr Justice Cocklecarrot: Pray sit down, Mr Dougal, you are not in Spartacus now. Proceed Miss Jones, and if you would care to remove any excess clothing, please feel free to do so. It is getting rather hot in here. Perhaps the usher could turn the heating up.

(The court then heard that Mr and Mrs Douglas were entitled to claim unprecedented damages for the invasion of their privacy

ZETA JONES PICTURE ROW



perpetrated by the photographers of Hullo! *magazine, who should have left them alone to be photographed exclusively on behalf of the* OK *magazine and its much-respected proprietor Lord Desmond of Filth. Miss Zed-List was then cross-examined by Sir Grately Overprice QC on behalf of Lord Asian of Babes.)*

Overprice: Miss Beta-Max, would you care to look at these charming photographs of yourself eating a delicious piece of cake. I submit that nothing could be more delightful than this scene.

Miss Indiana Jones: Now you listen here, boyo. I've had about enough of you, you posh git. One more slimy remark like that and you get it in the mouth.

Cocklecarrot: Miss Zed-Cars, although everyone in this courtroom will be deeply sympathetic to your feelings of outrage in being forced to answer questions instead of being simply handed a cheque for £1 million, I'm afraid that you must do your best to assist the court.

Miss Tom-Jones: I'm sorry, Your Worship, my feelings ran away with me.

Kirk Douglas: Don't overdo it, sweetie, they're eating out of your hand. Don't blow it now.

Cocklecarrot: I notice that it is already half-past eleven and time for luncheon. If you are free, Miss Peter-Jones, I should be delighted to escort you to the Ladies Annexe at the Garrick, where they serve a delicious plate of fish. You, Mr Dougal, will, I am sure, welcome the opportunity to stay here, to prepare yourself for this afternoon's performance. Perhaps you could look over your lines.

Usher: Pray be upstanding for Miss Zeta-Jones.

(The case continues.)

ROY of the ROOS
IT'S THE BIG MATCH—ENGLAND VS AUSTRALIA
BLIMEY SKIP! THE BALL'S THE WRONG SHAPE. WHAT DO I DO WITH THIS?
I DUNNO MATE- WIN I GUESS
STREWTH! IT'S GONE IN THE BACK OF THE NET!
IT'S A HAT-TRICK
YES-CRICKET, TENNIS AND SOCCER!
RIPPER RESULT- CONSIDERING IT'S NOT OUR SPORT
IT'S NOT THEIRS EITHER!
IT WAS AN INEXPERIENCED TEAM AND THE CROWD LET US DOWN
THERE'S ONE THING WE CAN STILL BEAT THEM AT-WHINGEING!
COME ON YOU BOOS!
J Cooper

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

That Charles Moore Archbishop Of Canterbury Interview In Full

Rowan Atkinson *(for it is he)*: May I begin, Your Grace, by asking you about the moral aspects of Kylie Minogue's bum, which we see very regularly featured in your newspaper?

Charles Moore: As the spiritual leader of this country's 2-million-strong Daily Telegraph community, I have a very difficult job balancing the demands of, on the one hand, the secular modern world, with its Kylie's bum, Liz Hurleys and so on, and the eternal verities, as represented by fox-hunting and the thoughts of the Venerable Deedes.

It's not always easy, is it, to walk that spiritual tightrope, but I think in general we've probably got it about right.

Atkinson: Do you feel that it was right to ordain women as columnists? I am thinking here of the likes of Sarah Sands, Vicki Woods and the Rabbi Barbara Amielburger.

Moore: Well, of course, we've been through a lot of trauma over this. On the one hand, the traditionalists absolutely hated these women columnists. On the other hand, there was the argument that Barbara Amiel was the wife of our proprietor, which meant that I would have been sacked if I didn't print her stuff. So, you know, it's all a matter of balance, which I think we've got pretty well right.

Atkinson: You must, of course, be worried by all the evidence that the number of believers in the Telegraph is falling steadily, year by year.

Moore: Well, I could show you places where the Telegraph is still tremendously popular. Only the other day I was in the first-class carriage of a train when I saw lots of people reading it, because it was given away free. It was a very heartening sight. And I think it shows that we're keeping a very good balance between not selling any copies at all and having to dump them on trains.

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Daily Mail

TOP TERRORIST PLUNGES LONDON INTO CHAOS

by Our Security Staff
Terror Wogan

London, Monday

BRITAIN's capital city was today brought to a complete standstill by one of the most daring terrorist campaigns of modern times.

Gridlock

Al Qaeda's top British agent, Red Q'en, the crazed newt-lover intent on world domination, has been planning to destroy London ever since he was elected leader of the GLC in 1981.

Q'en's fiendish plan, unfolded to the world through a secret video beamed to the world by Channel 5's 'Good Evening, London' programme, has two simple stages:

1. To force all Londoners to abandon their cars in the streets and to use London's hated public transport system.

2. Then to close down London's tube and bus system, forcing everyone back into their cars where they die a slow death from asphyxiation by carbon monoxide poisoning or being bored to death by cabbies ringing Radio Five Live to complain about the phasing of traffic lights.

Q'en, the mastermind behind the greatest disaster inflicted on London since the Blitz (already being spoken of as London's 9/11), has known links with a number of the world's most notorious terrorist organisations, including the IRA, the SWP and the Newt Liberation Army, a splinter group from the Popular Front For The Liberation of Aquatic Creatures (PFLAC). He is known for his anti-American views and hatred of western capitalism and *(cont. p. 94)*

COUGH TO END CONGESTION

THE TORY leader Mr Iain Duncan Cough today declared himself to be "speechless" at the congestion charge (and indeed every other subject under the sun). *(Rotters)*

JACKSON ACCUSES BASHIR OF BETRAYAL

Editorial:
Why is the government trying to scare us? – That's the Daily Mail's job p. 7

Daily Mail

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2003

Peter McLie, the world's worst columnist – 'Blair is tired and seedy'. An expert writes p. 7

HOUSE PRICE FALL MAY BRING FALL IN HOUSE PRICES – SHOCK NEWS

By Our Panic Staff
Clare Monger

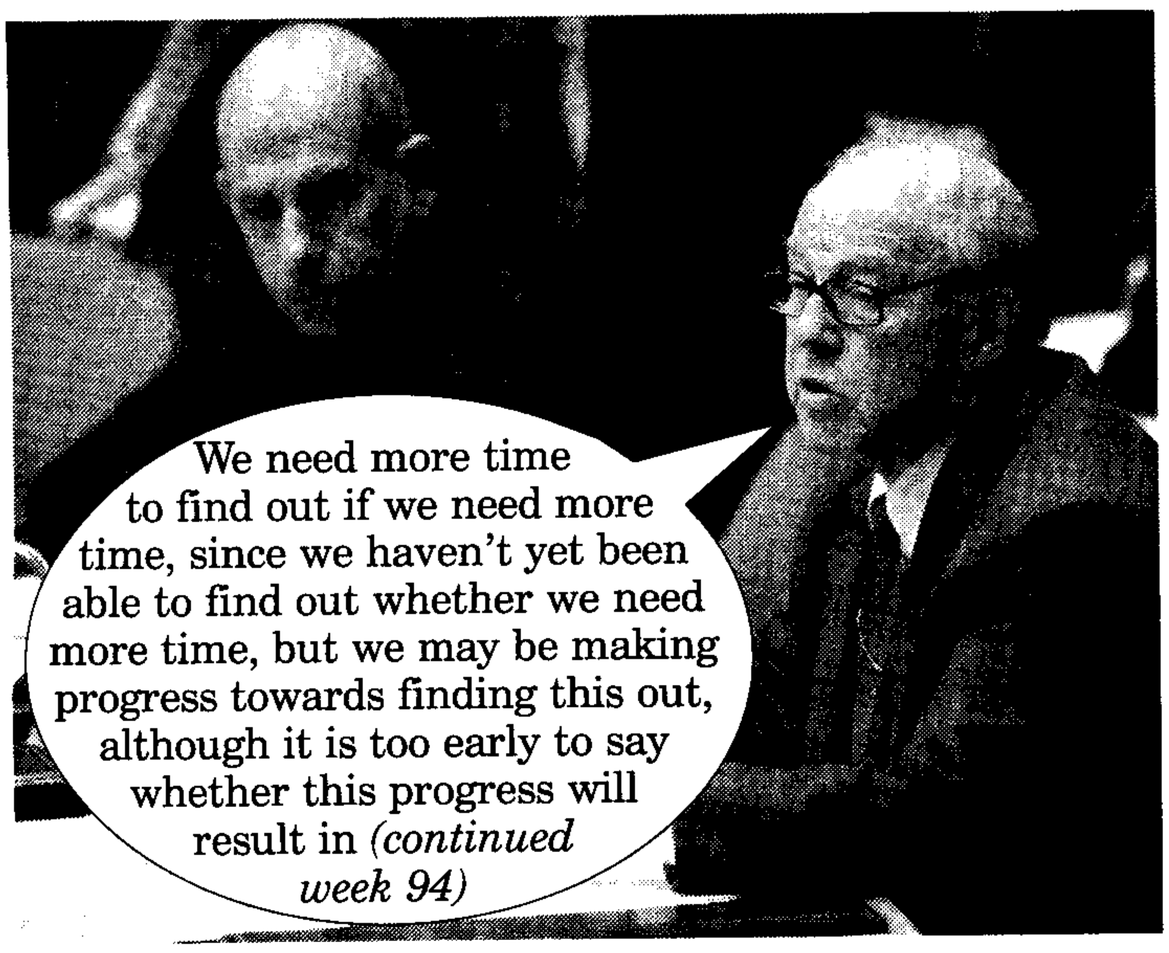
BRITAIN was bracing itself today for a fall in house prices which would have a dramatic knock-on effect on property values.

"Make no mistake," said a leading expert, "the fall in house prices is going to mean that houses are worth less than they used to be. This in turn will mean that the property market will take a dive and that the bricks and mortar boom will be over."

He continued, "The government must act now. If house prices continue to fall, they won't go up any more.

"People may be worried about the war in Iraq and terrorist attacks at home but, compared to a fall in house prices, the end of the world seems pretty irrelevant."

HANS BLIX MAKES IT CLEAR


We need more time to find out if we need more time, since we haven't yet been able to find out whether we need more time, but we may be making progress towards finding this out, although it is too early to say whether this progress will result in *(continued week 94)*

Late News

'50% REDUCTION WILL HAPPEN' SAYS NUMBER 10

DOWNING STREET has confirmed that it is standing by the Prime Minister's pledge of a 50% reduction by September in the number of promises he makes on crime, education and asylum-seekers.

"Many people think that this is an impossible figure to achieve, given the record number of promises made last year," admitted a Number 10 spokesman, "but we believe, as long as he's off playing international statesman, this target can be met."

The opposition ridiculed the figure, saying they saw no end to the flood of promises flooding into the country and *(cont. p. 94)*

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Dolly The Sheep

So. Farewell
Dolly.

How different from
When you were
Born.

I wrote then
"Hello Dolly".

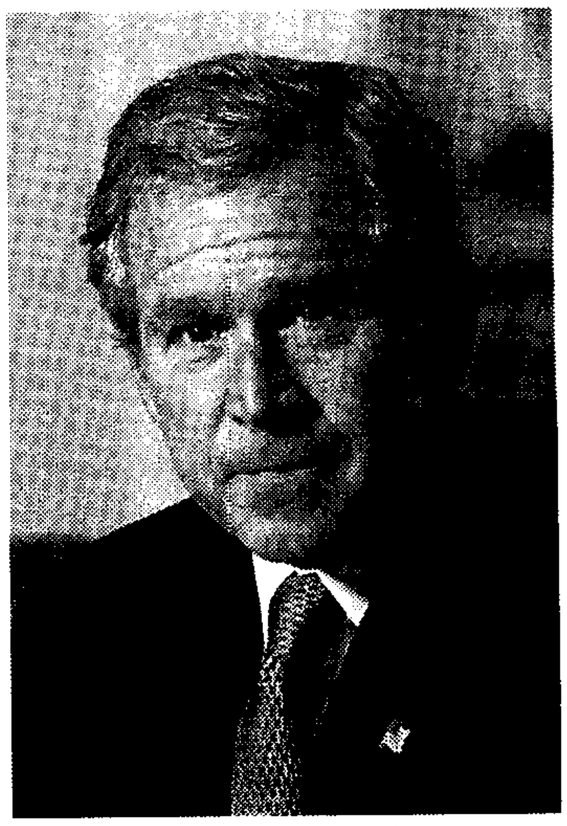
Now, in the
Words of
Another popular song,
"Goodbye Dolly,
We must put
You to sleep.

Because this
Cloning business
Does not seem
To work very
Well."

E. J. Thribb (17½)

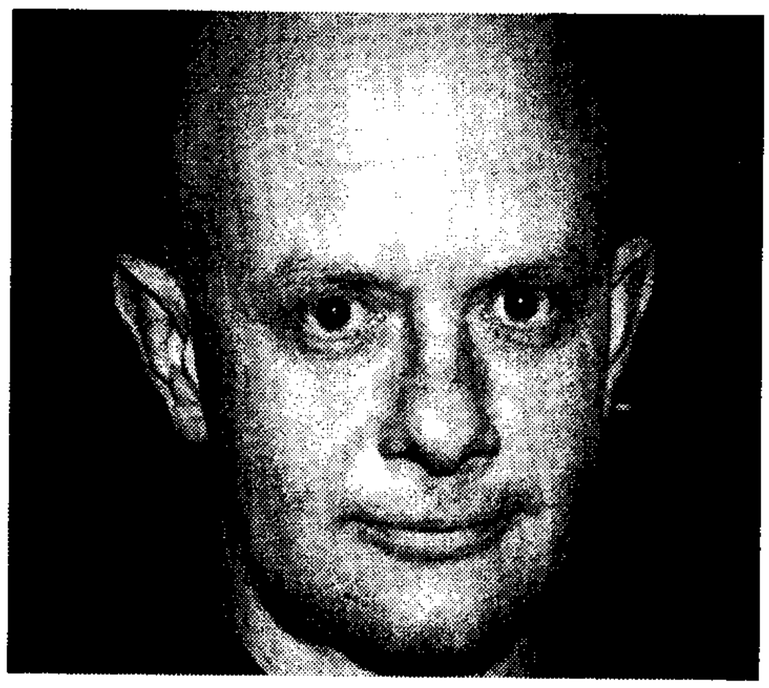
(This poem will be read out by Miss Daisy Goodwin as part of her BBC2 programme 'Love Poems to Sheep')

NATO FALLS OUT OVER TURKEY



"They're French knickers"

DIARY



NICK HORNBY: FOUR MORE SONGS

***Woopy Doopsy Doopsy Do* – Alvin Stardust**

So we were doing this thing, this sort of party thing, and it was kind of scary at first, but when we were halfway through, and the band was really rocking, and I was starting to groove to the downbeat, I thought, ok, this is the kind of thing that makes me feel really great and really into other human beings and really good about myself.

And you can't ask for more than that.

Well, perhaps you can, but I can't, that's the way I am, take it or leave it.

The song playing at this epiphanic Homeric moment of superbly intense intensity was "Woopsy Doopsy Doopsy Do" by Alvin Stardust, the little known B-side to the very - hard - to - lay - your - hands - on - but - I - managed American bootleg version of Stardust's more famous 'My Coo-Ca-Choo". I guess at some time or another in what passes for our lives most of us have stayed up all night over the Nescafe and roll-ups arguing over whether late Stardust is better than early Stardust (in my experience there are, let's face it, few takers for mid-Stardust, though I have this friend, right, who will argue you into the ground that Stardust circa 80-83 is plangently yet remorselessly beautiful) but that's hardly the point, guys, now is it? In my book, you either like "Woopsy Doopsy Doopsy Do" or you don't. And if you're in, then you'd better get in and stay in, and bloody shut the door behind you and find a place in your heart for one of the great Stardustian moments, showing Stardust at his aggressively gentle best. And if you're one of those snooty types who watch films with subtitles and argue over your glass of lightly-chilled Chardonnay that Jane Austen is right up there with Bruce Springsteen and think that there's more poetry in John Milton than in Nobby Stiles (and, don't tell me, you wear a spotty cravat and a monocle to eat your smoked salmon sandwiches) then all I can say is just open your ears and listen to the way Stardust sings the "oo" on that second "Doopsy" and for those few moments you'll suddenly know that there's a God in his heaven, and even if there's not then there damn well should be.

***Grunt* – Suicide**

Don't tell me this isn't a great track, arguably the greatest 3minute 17second track in the whole history of rock music over the past four months, ok, five. Because if that's what you're really trying to tell me – and you really must be joking – then what I'd have to tell you is that that's just like saying "Baby Baby Baby" by The Puddle Incorporating MC Blubba is not the second-greatest dance-track of all time.

I first heard 'Grunt' while picking at a small scab on my right knee in a blue nylon sleeping bag with this girl I knew in the autumn of '81. It wasn't like I was really into Suicide at that time or anything, though I quite liked the 68-second drum solo – bafflingly comprehensible – on their Letting Off album. But hearing 'Grunt' then – and 278 times since – has convinced me that it is not only abrasively soothing, but also a timely reminder that, say what you like, it takes all sorts to make a world.

***Let's Get It Onan* – Marvin Gaye**

All I can say is, there's this triple album bootleg available only by mail-order from Amsterdam, where Gaye famously spent six months eighteeen days and four hours in the summer of '78, and on the fourth track, second side of this bootleg comes this searingly cool re-working of his second most famous track of all time.

Like most blokes I know, every day before I make the fourteen-minute round-trip to the corner-shop for my Twix bar (the first Twix I ever tasted, and the seventh, ninteenth and one hundred and thirty fifth, the song playing in the background – loudly, dauntingly, memorably, quietly, adverbally – was Springsteen's Thunder Road) I record a new tape of the greatest-in-the-world-ever-of-all-time songs I've heard from the day before, to see me through the seven minutes there, seven minutes back. Gaye's supremely little-known 'Let's Get It Onan' has a good claim to being the eighth greatest song ever written about self-abuse. Over the past five years, I've played it 139 times, not counting the three times I've started to play it but have only half-heard it because the doorbell's gone and rung shortly after the second chorus.

You can keep your Mozart. He's never done much for me, to be honest. Me, I need no convincing that if it ever came to an arm-wrestling contest, Marvin would knock Wolfgang into a cocked hat, even though they're both dead. Which just goes to show.

***I Just Spewed Up My Big Mac, Mum* – Screech Machine**

You could argue that one of the consolations of art – and by art I don't just mean art – is that it makes you think you are more than what you thought you were when you first thought of thinking about what you were. And it that's what you were to argue, then I wouldn't argue with you. Me, I've got better things to do than wasting time arguing the toss over things like that. As everyone knows, this is the fourth track on the second side of Screech Machine's third album, and for me 'I Just Spewed Up My Big Mac, Mum' is easily in the running for the fifth best rock song with a regurgitation theme ever recorded.

Listening to it for the eighth time, I noticed three new things. First, the gut-wrenching guitar solo by Spew just forty-two seconds in. It's the kind of melancholically euphoric solo that makes you realise that there may well be such a thing as free will, and that human beings need not be automatically preconditioned to behave as their genes and environment tell them to. Second, the way the lead singer, Greg Oaf, sings the bleakly optimistic lines:

"I just sicked up my fries, too, mum
And now it's the ketchup's turn"

over and over again reminds us that repetition is the mainstay of all great art, whether it's Shakespeare (who, let's face it, is a bit on the wordy side) or Imbruglia (who's not). And third, the song as a whole – and I'm trying to be honest here – is a reminder that, say what you like, sometimes you're better off following your own path, no matter what other people may say, and that sometimes, just sometimes, life turns out like you hoped it might, if only for a few seconds.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

DAD'S NEW ALBUM HAS BEEN A TERRIBLE FLOP. CRITICS HAVE REALLY SLAMMED IT.
OH NO.
BUT MUM'S NEW LINGERIE LINE HAS BEEN A FANTASTIC SUCCESS!
COOL!
AND WEIRDLY IT'S BROUGHT THEM CLOSER TOGETHER. JOHNSON SAYS THEY'VE GOT LOADS IN COMMON NOW...
BOTH THEIR CAREERS ARE PANTS!
SNIGGER

Literary Review

Turner – no prize

Stripped Bare
Lowri Turner
(Headline, £12)

CONSIDER, if you will, the following sentence: "The sunlight cut through the Venetian blinds like a stack of razor blades." Is this a bad piece of writing? Not really: it sets a scene. It suggests a milieu – Venetian blinds are a hallmark of middle-class urban respectability – it implies that the shining sun is, in this instance, not hugely welcome by the room's inhabitant. It is the work of Lowri Turner, fashion journalist, TV personality and, all things considered, perfectly passable first-time author.

If we are to be picky, her prose style errs towards excess. Her editor might have told her that saying "*Brrng Brrng*. The phone rang." Or "*waaaaah*. The baby started crying is like saying "*Clap Clap!* Someone clapped." This in turn might have trimmed the novel down from a flabby 500 pages to something more handbag friendly. Other irritating tics include an insistence on cramming in semi-humorous similes at every available opportunity, like a big bus that's full of passengers but then the driver lets on just one more, or like a box of chocolates where you keep finding extra layers, or like a Christmas tree with a fairy on every branch.

But in the main it does the author a disservice to lump *Stripped Bare* into the cesspit of chick lit. Although her book has the mandatory day-glo cover, the wincing pun for a title and is all about useless husbands and female protagonists whose tragic flaw is a propensity to overcook the pasta, there is something more here.

It's not that it's any good, of course. No, this is another despatch from that now-familiar parallel world where a greying bra is a catastrophe and George Clooney can make it all better. But behind the story there is a wonderful tale being told: a tale of modern-day publishing, who reads what and why. *Stripped Bare* is assuredly an excruciating novel, but it's also a fascinating historical document.

Lowri Turner is best known for presenting BBC1's *DIY SOS*, a makeover programme in which she and her team of professionals descend upon misguided pieces of handiwork and set everything to rights. It's a cross between *Changing Rooms* and *Casualty*, with episode titles like "lumpy ceiling" and "en-suite embarrassment." For her debut novel Ms Turner has performed an astonishing imaginative leap and told the story of... a mass-market TV makeover programme called *On the House*. It is presented by an expansive fop who is meant to be Laurence Llewelyn Bowen of *Changing Rooms* fame. It is set in the here and now, with copious, thinly-veiled references to the zeitgeist, so that *Big Brother* is known as *Big Sister* and *Through the Keyhole* is renamed *The Other Side of the Letter Box*. In other words, this is a bizarre amalgam of a roman à clef – what really happens behind the scenes in TV, as the title suggests – and a standard girlie read.

What's unusual about this roman à clef is that it requires no clef. Every character Turner references is instantly recognisable, every programme she knocks instantly obvious. Even her TV insider knowledge is hardly revelatory, telling us that people who make TV shows are vacuous and posh, presenters are vacuous and stroppy, and executives are vacuous and immoral. All of this is strangely self-defeating: if we are to trust Turner's insider knowledge, then we should stop watching her shows, which are revealed as a sham. If we are not to trust her insider knowledge, why buy her book?

The reason people *will* buy her book (advertised as "To DIY for") is because *Stripped Bare* is to fiction as *Hello!* is to serious reportage – a beach-read romp set in a celebrity netherworld that is neither wholly real nor wholly unreal. It is deliberately predictable, feebly salacious in its terms of reference, as naughty as a small child repeating a swear word. Like *Hello!* it is sold on what it purports to reveal. Like *Hello*! it reveals nothing – but if the sales of *Hello*! are anything to go by, that is precisely what the public wants.

Why the public wants it is a mystery that remains unsolved, but it renders *Stripped Bare* peculiarly of its time. Everyone should have a copy. Then they should bury it in a time capsule along with a picture of the Beckhams, a tape of *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here* and the *Fame Academy* album.

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS Pt94

The Invention of Dr Cake
Andrew Motion

...Really, you know, one likes a change every now and then. I mean, the art of biography can be so predictable, can't it? All those hours sleuthing in the archives, those hetacombs of footnotes. Surely the connection between experience and achievement should be more oblique? And so recently I've been casting about for different ways of doing things. Why ferret out all those facts when you can simply make them up? It was this experimental impulse that led me to the work of that sadly neglected Romantic poet Dr Hugh Fauntleroy Heigh, to whom Keats addressed his immortal enquiry *"Dear Heigh, Fanny and I are having a garden party on Thursday, will you come? If wet in the orangery. Yrs J.K."* But where, I asked myself, did Heigh come by the astonishing late outburst of sensuality that led him to pen the lines "My Mary's estates lie deep in Dorset/Would that I roamed within her corset"? Which brings us in a roundabout way to his friendship with the mysterious Dr Cake...

And so entering the doctor's chamber once more I stopped again to regard him. He was haggard, like one

who yearns for slumber, his breath rising in horrid gasps and shudders.

"Mr Heigh," he remarked. "I am pleased to see you. Let us continue with the interesting series of poetical speculations on which we commenced Monday fortnight. Do you imagine, for example, that had Keats lived he would still have written poetry?

"It is entirely probable, sir," I replied, wishing to humour him.

"And that he might very well have concealed himself in some remote rural region, disguising himself as a humble medical man."

"Again, sir, I cannot deny such a possibility."

"Where he might well have conducted a friendship with so genteel and obliging attendant as yourself."

"Indeed."

"Well, sir, you are as deluded and pitiable a fool as Professor Motion with his fanciful notions... [continues]

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ CLARE Alexander, ex-Penguin and Macmillan editor and now an agent with Gillon Aitken Associates, cropped up in the *Evening Standard* last week with a curious, gushing article on "Women on top" in publishing.

The glass ceiling had been shattered, she told us. Random House, Penguin and HarpicCollins were now run and dominated by female executives, all "natural 'multi-taskers'" by simple virtue of their gender, and similarly well-equipped to deal with the modern world of "joined-up" publishing.

Such generalisations would be deemed sexist if made in relation to men, but that doesn't detain Alexander on the way to her ultimate goal, which is to swathe the ladies at the top of HarperCollins in the finest *arslikhan*.

US-based boss of bosses Jane Friedman, and her lieutenants – Vicky Barnsley, Amanda Ridout and the newly-poached Caroline Michel – were all described as "formidable". Will les femmes d'Harpic respond to this eulogy by gratefully purchasing vast quantities of books from Alexander?

■ NOW *Cats* has been neutered and Faber & Faber can no longer lap up the cream from the royalties, it seems the firm is having a hard time.

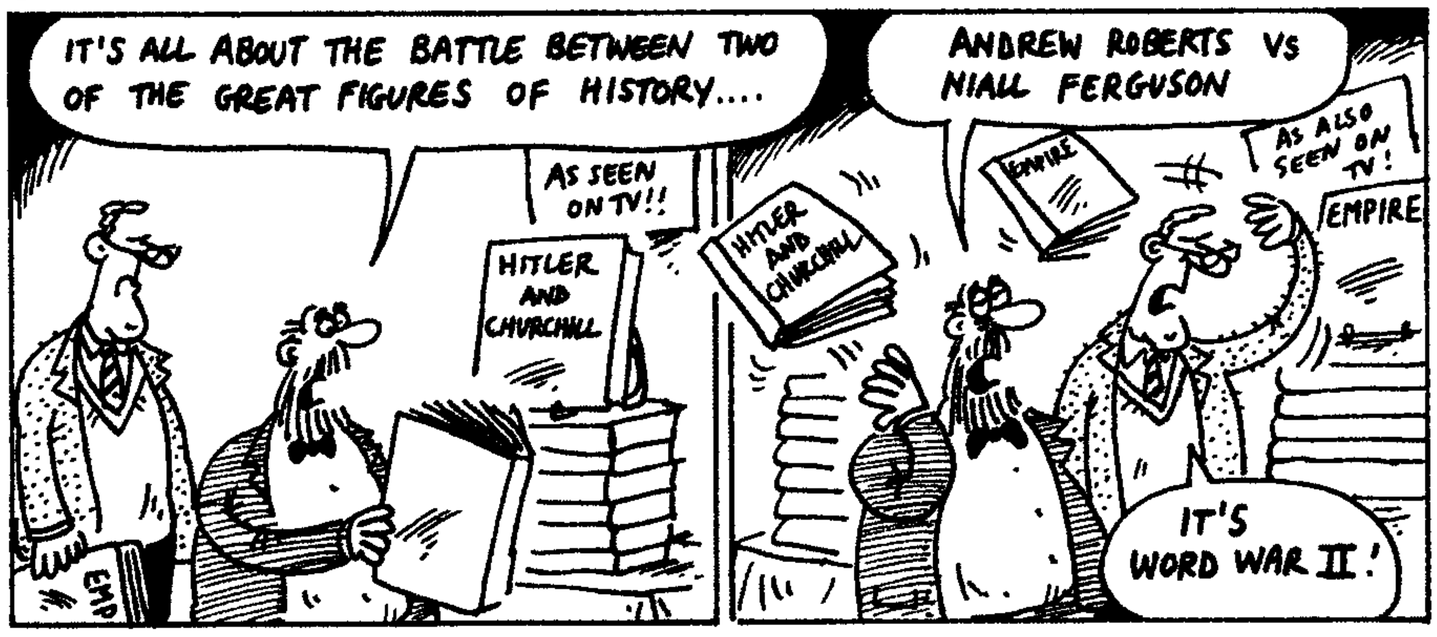
Fragrant Harbour by John Lanchester was printed in huge quantities and promoted heavily by Waterstone's both in-store and in its house magazine. All of this was to no avail. Faber was reduced to doling out free copies to guests at a recent £100-a-head Arvon Foundation event, whether they wanted one or not. Meanwhile, the remainder shops await delivery of the balance of the print run.

The relationship between Faber and Waterstone's is an interesting one. Old Waterstonians now infest the Faber hierarchy at every level. Not least of these is head of marketing Noel "Spud" Murphy, who came, via Bloomsbury, from the Brentford bearpit.

Even fresh-faced CEO Stephen Page did time with Waterstone's predecessors Sherratt and Hughes way back when. Could these illustrious alumni be using their connections back at Brentford to get preferential treatment?

'Bookworm'

■ News from Penguin – the famous logo is going to be made slimmer when the corporate ID is refreshed soon A skinny bird is more 2003, apparently, with the penguin getting the Kate Winslet/Sophie Dahl treatment.


IT'S ALL ABOUT THE BATTLE BETWEEN TWO OF THE GREAT FIGURES OF HISTORY....
AS SEEN ON TV!!
HITLER AND CHURCHILL
ANDREW ROBERTS VS NIALL FERGUSON
HITLER AND CHURCHILL
EMPIRE
AS ALSO SEEN ON TV!
EMPIRE
IT'S WORD WAR II!

IN THE BACK

SIR NICK STEPS DOWN?

LAST week's highly critical Commons treasury select committee report on the sale by private finance initiative of tax and customs offices for £370m to a company in a tax haven stopped just short of calling for the resignation of Inland Revenue chairman Sir Nicholas Montagu.

However, the *Mail on Sunday* on 9 February mentioned the possibility and on the BBC's *File On Four* on 4 February, Labour MP Austin Mitchell called out loudly for Sir Nicholas to go. The full story isn't over yet, of course; but the consensus is that, despite Sir Nicholas's defiance when the report was published, he will be very lucky to survive in his job without the support of chancellor Gordon Brown.

On *File on Four* Mitchell contemptuously dismissed Sir Nicholas's plaintive plea that he had "no alternative" but to sell his buildings to a company in a tax haven. Sir Nicholas pretends that the rules of the European Union (EU) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) insist that a government agency cannot turn down a contract with a competitive firm, even if that firm is in a tax haven, as was Mapeley Steps when it bought the buildings. Mitchell pointed out that in the United States, the land of the free where the WTO is universally revered, the government "will not let contracts out or come to arrangements or deals with any organisation based in a tax haven". That should be the position here, he said.

The most embarrassing moment for Sir Nicholas during the hearings at the Commons was a devastating intervention by the man sitting next to him, Richard Broadbent, chairman of Customs & Excise. Asked why he had not got legal advice at the time of the Mapeley contract, Sir Nicholas replied: "Because it was not necessary. This is essentially belt and braces. Government lawyers right across Whitehall tell their departments that the European procurement law and World Trade Organisation rules do prohibit discrimination on the grounds of lawful tax practices. When interest in the Mapeley contract was evident in the media [an oblique reference to the *Eye*] and more widely, and it became clear that your committee would take an interest, we thought that it was wise as I say on belt and braces grounds to seek advice from leading counsel which confirmed the view of government lawyers across Whitehall."

The Chancellor and his admirers on the Commons Treasury Select Committee

Mr Broadbent interrupted at once. "I just have one comment on the EU position. I am not sure it is right," he said. In his opinion, the real reason the Inland Revenue and customs had gone ahead with the sale of the buildings, even after they discovered that the purchasing company was in a tax haven, was time: the contract was so far developed that there would have been "quite material dangers if we had just turned round and shifted the goalposts". Thus the two chairmen in front of the committee squabbled with each other about the real reason they did not hesitate to sell government buildings into a tax haven.

Two other matters arise from the Inland Revenue's defence of its position and the select committee report. The first is Sir Nicholas's rather startling view that the sale of the buildings to Mapeley Steps was not tax avoidance at all. The purchasing companies, he whined, were not registered in the UK and did not pay UK tax. So they could not avoid UK tax. This was absurd on two counts.

First, when the contract was signed, Delancey Estates, which had 15 percent of Mapeley, *was* registered in the UK and therefore *would* incur UK capital gains tax. Second, the whole purpose of the British treasury's increasing opposition to tax havens is that the companies there avoid tax anywhere in the world.

The British treasury, in the shape of paymaster-general Dawn Primarolo, who chairs the EU code of conduct group on this subject, constantly speaks out against tax havens. She does so not just because British tax can be avoided but because the whole point of setting up in the havens is to avoid tax somewhere, and so tax-collecting countries all over the world unite to isolate and boycott the havens. This is the significance of the Revenue's massive PFI deal with Mapeley Steps in Bermuda.

If these were the only points he has to deal with, Sir Nicholas might keep his job. But by far the most serious charge against him is that he failed to tell treasury ministers that he was selling government buildings into a tax haven. The committee's report says: "The responsible minister [Primarolo] was not informed of key events before they took place and she is, in our view, right to be deeply disappointed by the service she received. We consider these to have been serious lapses, well below the standards expected, by all the officials concerned."

Sir Nicholas has publicly grovelled about this lapse, insisting it was just "pure oversight". But was it? Consider the sleazy history of the project. A few days before the contract with Mapeley was signed, David Hartnett, the Revenue board's deputy chairman, had a worrying thought. A lot of the property deals he'd encountered in the past had been funnelled through tax havens. So he asked Mapeley about the structure of its deal. Was it by any chance intending to base its purchasing company in a tax haven? Yes, came the reply.

Hartnett passed on the frightful news to his chairman, Sir Nicholas, and to several specialists in the Revenue, whose advice was not to touch the deal with a bargepole. What happened next? Isn't it obvious that Sir Nicholas and his close colleagues went into a huddle and decided a) to go ahead with the deal; and b) that everything would be much more peaceful if no one told any elected ministers about the tax haven?

Wasn't this deception carried forward into the Inland Revenue and customs accounts which three times managed to publish the wrong name of the company to which they were selling their buildings (in all three cases the company whose wrong name they published was registered in the UK)? Wouldn't these gross errors and deceptions have lasted perhaps forever if they hadn't been exposed in the *Eye*?

If Sir Nicholas and colleagues were taking part in a conspiracy of deception, should they not be sacked by the ministers they were deceiving? Or is the commitment of Gordon Brown, Primarolo etc to PFI deals so absolute that they are prepared to tolerate being deceived by their own officials in the interest of the sleaziest PFI deal of them all?

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **ASBESTOS:** Thousands more sick and dying asbestos victims look set to be robbed of compensation thanks to dirty deals by the companies who poisoned them.

Eye readers will recall how, after a long court battle, Turner & Newell was finally forced to accept liability for the Armley asbestos victims, many of whom have mesothelioma — the always-fatal cancer caused by asbestos. But then the US giant Federal Mogul bought out T&N and promptly declared itself bankrupt. Payments stopped immediately and all court actions were halted pending bankruptcy proceedings.

Unlike the UK, US bankruptcy legislation allows a company to declare part of its business insolvent while allowing the rest to trade. Thus Federal Mogul was able to ditch its asbestos liabilities – and it looks set to do the same again. It is planning to buy another company with big asbestos liabilities, Bendix, from Honeywell International. Around 47,000 asbestos victims from factories in the UK and around the world have actions against Bendix. If the deal goes ahead, those victims or their families will no doubt join the queue awaiting the outcome of Federal Mogul's bankruptcy administration. If they live long enough, they risk being edged out by much larger claims from US citizens.

■ **CAFCASS:** The mess at the children and family services court agency (prop: Lord Irvine, lord chancellor) which is supposed to protect the rights of vulnerable children, continues.

Irvine promised MPs more than a year ago that he was "very much" on the agency's case after it lurched from one crisis to the next. But disgruntled guardians are still leaving in droves, leading to shortages of fully qualified staff, delays in allocating cases (some children still wait anything from four to 12 weeks to be allocated a guardian) and unacceptable hold-ups in court proceedings.

Some children's cases have been taking over a year to complete, adding to the youngsters' distress and uncertainty. The concerns of the guardians were set out in a resignation letter before Christmas from one of the country's most experienced child advocates. Accusing a burgeoning management of confusion and bungling, Veronica Swenson wrote: "The simultaneous wastage of public funds in the organisation and starving of vital resources in the services have impoverished the service to children and their families... As a result children's welfare and rights are being seriously prejudiced."

The previous month the Association of Lawyers for Children expressed concern that the representation of children in family proceedings "has deteriorated and continues to deteriorate as a result of serious problems with Cafcass including substantial underfunding".

A 10 percent pay rise last month to overworked and under-resourced self-employed guardians has done little to boost morale or head off resignations and high levels in sickness. Good job Lord Irvine didn't take his own recent pay rise, perhaps.

■ **FOOTBALL NEWS:** "World Exclusive" was the tag given by the *Daily Mail* to its massive double-page spread on February 12, extracted from Tom Bower's new book on football sleaze.

The story was about the *Eye*'s old friend, Cheshire football agent Paul Stretford, and his role in signing Milton Nunez for Sunderland for more than £1m. The deal turned out to be a bit of a disaster – and you could have read the world exclusive about it here (*Eye* 1071).

TRIAL AND ERROR

INNOCENT Britons abroad should perhaps beware the introduction next year of the European arrest warrant.

It will require European Union member states to recognise each other's legal systems, irrespective of the standards of judges and the local legal vagaries. As the case of jailed Briton Kevan Sloan demonstrates, these can lead to serious miscarriages of justice.

Mr Sloan, a British tourist from Merseyside who was charged with five supermarket robberies in Tenerife, was confident all the charges would be dropped as he could prove he was in the UK when three of the crimes were committed and had cast-iron alibis for the other two.

Because all five robberies were alleged to have been committed by the same Spanish-speaking robber, it seemed logical that even without the alibi evidence, if Mr Sloan couldn't have carried out three of the crimes he clearly wasn't the guilty man.

However, though three of the charges were dropped and his alibi evidence for the fourth was accepted, the case on the fifth went ahead. And even though five witnesses testified that he was in a bar with them at the time the robbery was committed, 28-year-old Mr Sloan, who had never been in trouble before, was convicted of stealing about £100 in pesetas at knifepoint and sentenced to three-and-a-half years' jail.

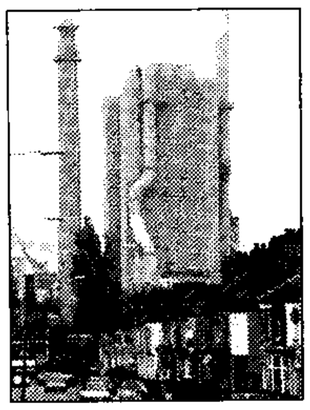
According to Fair Trials Abroad, the conviction was on the basis of CCTV footage of a man who did not look a bit like Kevan, and the identification evidence of the storekeeper. She had originally said the robber spoke Spanish as his native tongue, when Kevan clearly did not. And she may have been confused because she had seen Kevan before as a customer: he frequented the shop as it was opposite his mother's apartment. But the storekeeper was never cross-examined.

Sarah de Mas, deputy director of Fair Trials Abroad, said: "Kevan's is one of the worst cases of injustice we have come across. There was no credible evidence." Nevertheless his appeal last year failed.

For Kevan, a yard manager at a builder's merchant for the past ten years, it has been devastating. His case has been taken up by MPs, led by George Howarth, who have tabled a Commons motion expressing grave concern about the "seriously flawed legal proceedings" that led to his conviction and continued detention. And while Spanish ministers have given assurances that he would get fair treatment, MPs are concerned at the delay.

His hopes now lie with the Spanish constitutional court in Madrid where he has lodged a claim under Spain's written guarantee of a fair trial and also, unusually, with the Spanish legal ombudsman, who has also agreed to scrutinise the way he was treated. In the meantime he hopes to secure early freedom this month by applying for deportation back to the UK – a move which will effectively ban him from Spain for 10 years, but which would still enable him to fight to prove his innocence.

BURNING ISSUES



LAST Tuesday night the chimney of the Rugby Cement works started belching out "thick dirty white dust" on to the houses, gardens and residents of New Bilton, Rugby.

For the RMC group which operates the plant – the biggest in the country and only three-quarters of a mile from the town centre – the spillage couldn't have come at a worse time. RMC is already pitched against the local community, the borough council and, crucially, the local primary care trust responsible for health, over its desire to start burning old tyres at the plant instead of fossil fuels.

Tuesday's accident shows that on still, damp days and nights the cement work's chimney fails to lift waste and potentially toxic pollution away from the residential area. In addition, RMC will have to argue against studies showing that tyre-burning results in even more toxic and carcinogenic pollutants, such as heavy metals and dioxins, than its existing fuels.

RMC didn't bother to assess the likely impact on health of tyre burning before making its application. And it has emerged that there has not been enough detailed measuring of existing dioxin and particulate emissions from the plant, nor monitoring of where the pollutants fall.

A key recommendation from the primary care trust is that there should be a year of baseline ambient air monitoring of existing emissions and continuous sampling of dioxins on the chimney before any trials of tyre-burning. It also recommends that Rugby Cement should fit more efficient "bag-house" filters to the plant.

Lillian Pallikaropoulos, the driving force behind Rugby in Plume, the action group that is fighting the changes, said: "Rugby Cement's own figures for 2002 admit to the emission of 122 tonnes of particulates during the year, and two tonnes of volatile organic compounds. Exactly what are the combination or levels of these poisons – arsenic, lead, mercury or whatever – or where they settled, we do not know."

Given the UK's pisspoor record on incinerator pollution, local people found it unbelievable that permission for such a huge plant in a residential area ever got the go-ahead.

The Environment Agency is investigating Tuesday's outfall and is considering whether to give the go-ahead for tyre burning.

A spokeswoman for Rugby Cement said Tuesday's "shower" resulted from maintenance work on the kiln, as part of the plant's annual shut down. "It was unacceptable and we are working with the EA to investigate, but we believe at this stage that it was mainly chalk dust."

SEVERN DAZE

4 DECEMBER last year turned out to be a great day for privatisation in Leicester. In the middle of the night a huge water main owned by the Severn Trent Water company, a privatised monopoly, burst. The deluge poured into a gas main owned by the privatised gas monopoly, Transco. The gas supply to 1,500 households – about 4,000 people – was cut off at once. But it took the privatised water monopoly (Severn Trent) eight hours to appreciate the extent of the crisis and cut the water off as well.

Some 200,000 gallons of water had to be pumped from the gas supply system before it could be reconnected. Shivering in cold December, and many of them unable to cook any meals, several of the unlucky inhabitants of the stricken area went out to buy fan heaters and microwaves. When they turned their new appliances on, the strain on the privatised electricity monopoly was too great… and the electricity ended up being cut off as well.

In the worst cases some people had to wait three or four weeks – right up until Christmas – before any of these vital supplies were reconnected. Transco sent engineers from all over the country to try to control the emergency and many of them were put up in the local Holiday Inn. Severn Trent, former prize winner in the Environment Agency's pollution Hall of Shame, was more relaxed. A spokesman told the *Eye* the company had not accepted responsibility for the disaster and was still arguing about that with Transco, which has paid the derisory statutory compensation of £30 a day.

In a Commons debate on 4 February, led off by Keith Vaz, MP for Leicester East, Nigel Griffiths, junior minister at the department of trade and industry, revealed that Transco had in total paid £187,000 compensation to 1,226 constituents – about £150 per person. Severn Trent, which most people regard as chiefly responsible, has not paid a penny (though its spokesman boasts that it subsidised the Belgrave neighbourhood centre to which the stricken families retreated).

Other gas suppliers owned by the electricity companies have been slow to pay up. One of them, owned by the electricity generator Powergen, is called Stay Warm. The desperate plight of these monopolies can be gleaned from their profit figures for last year: Transco, £1.3bn; East Midlands Electricity (owned by Powergen), £298m; and Severn Trent, £357m.

On the evening of the Commons debate Severn Trent threw one of its famously lavish parties for MPs in the Commons banqueting room. All three companies are grateful to the government for not carrying out any of the former Labour promises to nationalise the privatised utilities. If they had done so, the person responsible for the Leicester disaster would have been the secretary of state for trade and industry, Patricia Hewitt, Labour MP for… Leicester West.

KPMG: HELD TO ACCOUNT

HARD on the heels of the British government's decision not to legislate to curb the conflicts of interest that arise when top accountants audit a company's accounts and then carry out other services for the company for more money, comes the news that the American branch of KPMG is being sued by the US financial regulator, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

The SEC alleges fraud by KPMG in its auditing of the accounts of Xerox, the disgraced copier company. The SEC announces that one of the main reasons for its action is… the conflict of interest between auditing the company's accounts ($26m for KPMG) and the non-audit services KPMG carried out for the company ($56m for KPMG).

Another charge against KPMG is that it repeatedly ignored warnings from accountants around the world. When Xerox insisted on more agreeable accounts, KPMG only "meekly" challenged the company and was "easily satisfied by untested self-serving management explanations". The senior KPMG partner on the audit account was Mike Conway. His behaviour so shocked his superiors he was promoted to take charge of the KPMG's audit and finance committee.

KPMG said it was "angry and incredulous" at the SEC writs, and announced plans to fight them through the courts. If it does, the extent of its behaviour will be exposed in open court. The probable outcome is that KPMG bosses will follow the example of their clients. Xerox escaped the embarrassing revelations of a court action by paying a $10m fine and the regulators walked away.

Meanwhile, how is one of KPMG's top British executives doing? Mike Rake got a whole article to himself in *Eye* 1062 when he was appointed chairman of KPMG International last year. The *Eye* highlighted his assertion that "KPMG is an organisation whose strength is its reputation for integrity and quality". Mr Rake got £1.6m last year, and KPMG's top management decided to sack the trustees of one of its ailing pension schemes for daring to suggest that KPMG pay more money into it.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

DAVID MILLS has probably assisted the police with more of their inquiries than any other lawyer and company administrator. But until recently the valuable and voluntary assistance provided by the husband of Blairite culture minister Tessa Jowell has mainly been limited to assisting assorted investigative magistrates in Italy in their seemingly never-ending pursuit of Tony Blair's multi-millionaire ally and fellow prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi.

Now it seems he may be called upon to assist the police nearer home: this time in the shape of the Serious Farce Office, which for some months has been investigating what happened to several boxes of files containing sensitive documents on Berlusconi's offshore business affairs.

The files are said to have been sent to London from Switzerland in the mid-90s, soon after the Italians began their investigation. They were secreted away before being shipped out of Britain, possibly to Malta – like Switzerland, a short hop from the Italian mainland. They have now disappeared.

The SFO is interested in what, if anything, Mills and certain of the staff at his company CMM Corporate Services may have known about the missing files. Berlusconi was a long-time client of Mills and CMM. Mills sold CMM in 1994 to Edsaco but continued to be involved with the company until 1995.

The SFO has also been examining evidence given to it in the past regarding Berlusconi following the raid carried out on Edsaco's offices in 1996 during which a number of Berlusconi-related files were seized – but not those now under investigation because they were not there. At that time Mills and others were interviewed by the SFO under its Section 2 powers whereby witnesses are compelled to answer. Some of those interviewed in 1996 have since been reinterviewed.

Neither Mills nor any of those questioned have been accused of any wrongdoing by the SFO whose inquiries, in association with the Italian authorities, are continuing.

This new investigation explains in part the SFO's presence at the Bow Street magistrates' court hearing earlier this month when Mills was summoned to give evidence as a defence witness in another Berlusconi trial, this time involving allegations that he bribed two judges to block the rival bidder for Italian food company SME.

That hearing was adjourned until next month when it emerged that a few days earlier Mills had been placed under formal investigation by magistrates in Milan. This was for alleged tax fraud and money-laundering regarding the purchase of TV rights by Mills-linked offshore companies from 1994 to 1996 which were then sold to Berlusconi's Mediaset group. The magistrates have for some time been investigating a Swiss banker and three Berlusconi associates in relation to the purchase by Mediaset of TV rights worth more than £300m. They want to know what happened to the millions which flowed into and out of the offshore network created by Mills.

Confronted by a scrum of almost entirely Italian reporters outside the Bow Street court, Mills later issued a statement declaring: "It goes without saying that I have done absolutely nothing wrong. I am baffled by this latest development." As Mills stressed, he has already given evidence as a witness in Italy and Britain on several occasions since the 1996 raids about his dealings with Berlusconi's Fininvest and Mediaset groups. He vehemently denies any knowledge or involvement in the money transfers.

The cases in which Mills has given previous evidence include investigations into allegations that a Mills-run offshore company – All Iberian of Jersey – was used to bribe former Italian prime minister Bettino Craxi. Berlusconi was found guilty on the Craxi bribe but on appeal the conviction was quashed because of Italy's statute of limitations.

Berlusconi has been investigated more times than any other leading politician. He has faced or is still facing 10 criminal trials or investigations in Italy and Spain. On three he has been found guilty

but succeeded in overturning the verdicts on appeal. However, Tony Blair and George Bush see nothing wrong in cosying up to this tainted right-winger who claims he is being persecuted by left-wing magistrates.

Nor is Berlusconi the only Italian client about whom Mills has been called to testify. In 1999 he was questioned as a witness at Bow Street by magistrates from Trento investigating the shipment of HIV and hepatitis-contaminated plasma which was used in blood products that infected 1,000 haemophiliacs. CMM had formed a British Virgin Islands company, Padmore, which was linked to the shipment. The targets of the Trento investigation were the Marcucci family, long time clients of Mills. He described the charges as outrageous.

As in all the previous investigations Mills has denied any wrongdoing and until the latest Mediaset case he has never been accused of anything other than running companies and obeying orders. Like many who operate offshore companies he insists that he breaks no law – whether his clients may be breaking their local laws is of course another matter. Doubtless he is equally confident that neither he nor his associates did anything wrong in the matter of the missing Berlusconi files. A view with which he and Downing Street will be hoping the SFO agrees.

TORY new boy Gregory Barker has so far failed to make much of a mark since being elected MP for the safe Sussex seat of Bexhill and Battle. His claims to a glittering City career – disputed by some in the constituency – have also seemed somewhat over-egged given events since his election.

Take his involvement in Simplygames.com, which Barker described in his CV to the Tory selection committee as "Europe's leading online retailer of computer games". Barker was until November 2000 its deputy chairman and remains a small shareholder with his wife Celeste.

Simplygames' founder was Asian millionaire Mark Kotecha, who stood as a Tory parliamentary candidate in 1997 and failed to become the Tory rival to Ken Livingstone as London mayor in 2000. Kotecha made £10m from selling his internet company Netlink.

Barker was said to have been instrumental in bringing in a £2m investment for Simplygames in 1999. The investors were sheltered behind an offshore company, Matterhorn Capital. Simplygames was said to be headed for a NASDAQ or AIM listing.

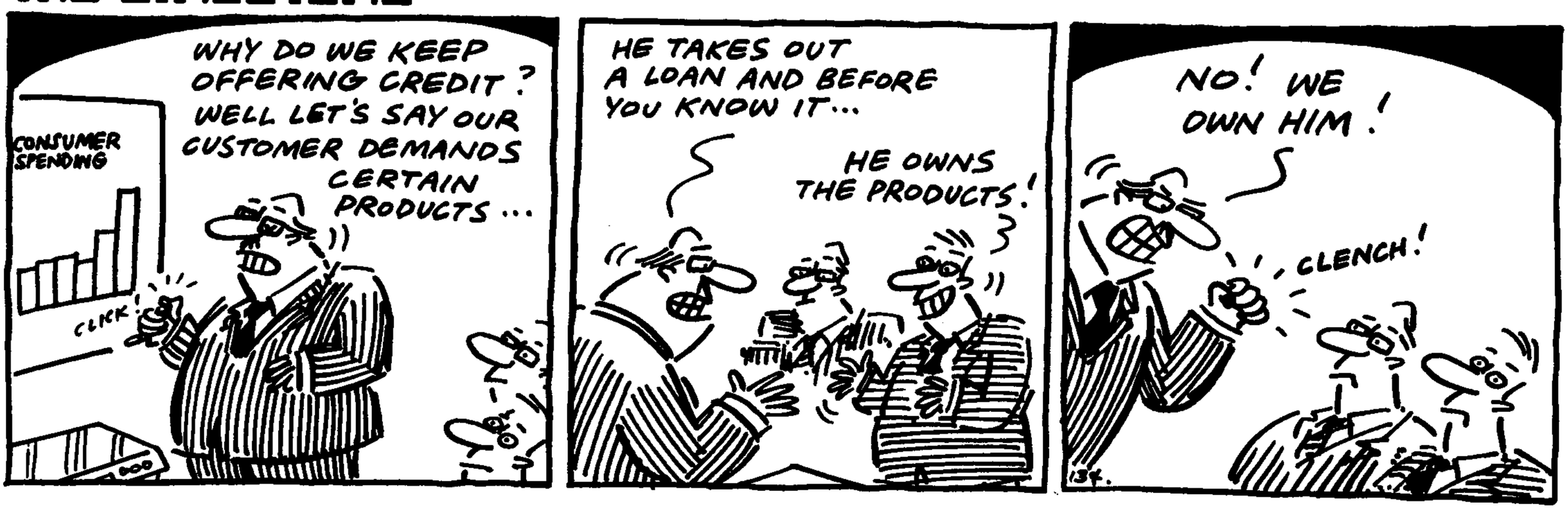
It is now one more casualty of the dotcom bubble. Accounts for the year to December 2000 – signed off in July 2002 – showed sales of £2.8m, double those during 1999; but the computer games were all sold at a loss. This, plus other costs totalling £4.5m, produced a loss of £2.9m, almost three times the loss for 1999. The planned acquisition of a German company somehow cost £1.1m when it fell through.

Some creditors agreed to accept reduced payment but others rejected this deal. The accounts were produced on a going concern basis dependent on the cash flow projected by Kotecha, the only director. Barker was owed £15,500 and bankers Robert Fleming £100,000. Abbreviated 2001 accounts showed a small loss, net liabilities and creditors owed £1.7m.

Hardly a great advertisement for a Tory MP or a wannabe.

THE decision not to charge Wessex Water chairman Colin Skellett in relation to the near £1m payment he received after the company was acquired by Malaysian group YTL will come as no surprise to *Eye* readers. The case was always going nowhere because there was no evidence of the corruption suggested – Skellett was not influential in last year's purchase of Wessex Water from Enron – and, perhaps more importantly, there

THE DIRECTORS — DREDGE & RIGG


WHY DO WE KEEP OFFERING CREDIT ? WELL LET'S SAY OUR CUSTOMER DEMANDS CERTAIN PRODUCTS ...
CONSUMER SPENDING
CLICK!
HE TAKES OUT A LOAN AND BEFORE YOU KNOW IT...
HE OWNS THE PRODUCTS!
NO! WE OWN HIM!
CLENCH!

Number crunching

£20,000

■ proposed pay rise for Lord Irvine which the *Daily Mail* called "outrageous"

£80,000

■ pay rise enjoyed by *Daily Mail* editor Paul Dacre this year

were no complainants.

Skellett claimed the money was an upfront consultancy payment to keep him at Wessex for five years. This was confirmed by YTL. However, Skellett had failed to inform his Wessex colleagues of his good fortune.

While critical of the way his arrest was handled by the City police, Skellett has declared he has no intention of taking legal action. This could well be a wise move as otherwise the full circumstances of how the £910,000 lump sum came to be paid into Skellett's Barclays bank account – the Malaysians also paid the tax due – might be aired.

The reason for the police suspicions was that it appears originally the money was to have been paid through an Isle of Man company by YTL "fixer" Martin Bushnell, rather than directly to Skellett. Only when this plan did not work was the money paid into his personal bank account. That – perhaps not surprisingly – aroused police concerns that the payment was a bribe. Just why the payment should have been made offshore has not been explained by Skellett or Bushnell; but both no longer have to give any explanations.

ATTEMPTS by disqualified directors Jared Brook and Lincoln Fraser to wrest back control of bankrupt Imperial Consolidated – into which some £200m of investors' money has disappeared – seem to have hit the buffers.

Brook and Fraser's associates had been soliciting support from IC mutual fund losers by persuading them to switch into a new creation: the Property International fund. IC investors were offered high returns – from a granite mine in Sierra Leone – in return for their shares in the Grenadian funds which are the major creditors of Imperial. These votes could then have been used to sack administrator Philip Lyon.

But before they could make their move Property International has gone the same route as the IC funds. Those who fell for this latest con have recently been told Property International will not be able to make its promised interest payments on time. What a surprise! Property International's investors are now two-time losers having handed over $2,500 as well as their fund units.

The SFO is belatedly on the Imperial case but this could take considerable time to determine given the multinational location of Imperial's companies and investors. But where is the Department of Timidity & Inaction other than living down to its reputation? There is considerable evidence, presented to the high court by Lyon in August last year when he obtained a worldwide freezing order for almost £37m against Brook and Fraser, that the duo had been acting as shadow directors at Imperial and elsewhere after they were disqualified by the DTI from being involved in the management of companies in February 2002 for four years. That is a criminal offence yet the DTI – as ever – seem to be sitting on its hands.

So too is the financial services authority (FSA) which hides behind the excuse that the IC funds were not authorised for sale in Britain. Shades of BCCI! The IC funds were only ever run from Imperial's offices in Lincolnshire and London. Brook and Fraser have been accused of gross negligence, misapplication of funds and breach of trust regarding £200m… but the FSA too sees no cause for action!

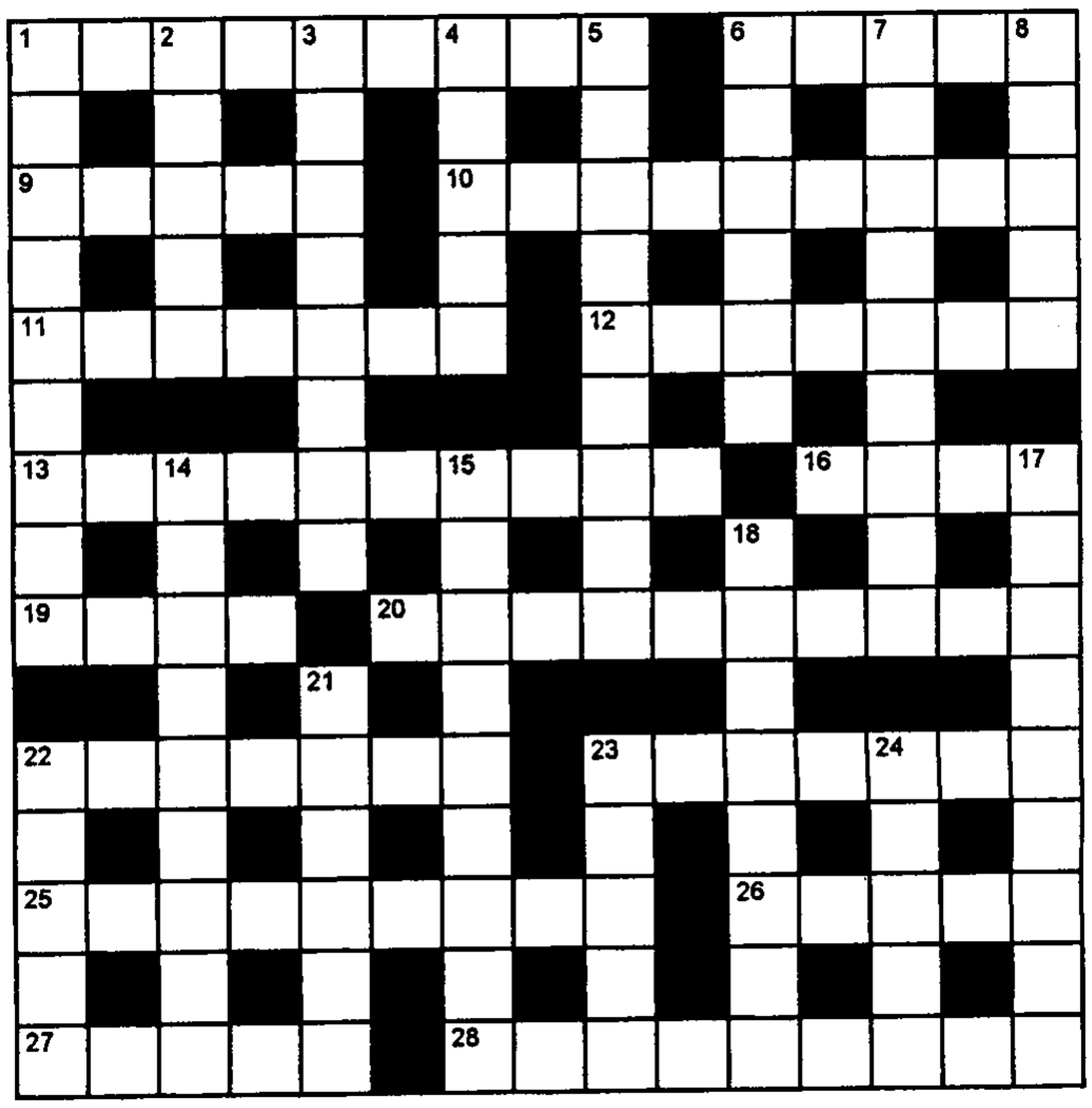
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 229

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 28 February 2003.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 So no need for explosives sniffer dogs? (5,4)
6 Glory's back with Brenda's domain? Sod off! (5)
9 Head off, in the manner of an impotent member, to Connote (5)
10 In connection with article, Brand is determined to get a shag (2,3,4)
11 Top sick way to dump a soap character? (4,3)
12 Jeweller turned over mobster and leaderless clan (7)
13/23ac. Runs evening up the score by an old American (10,7)
16 Furtive Tony has the power of rejection (4)
19 Bosom friends slip length for cash (4)
20 Grossly coarse when taken in rest: that's the majority of soldiers (5,5)
22 Marvin's full of information, like the claimed basis of the queen's sexual orientation (3,4)
23 See 13
25 Boycott's "jet-shag" (9)
26 Times: 'Estonia's chief politician in sex reversal' (5)
27 Topless, go in for bondage and anaesthetic (5)
28 As the vicar says: "Pays to rule out love romps" (3,2,4)

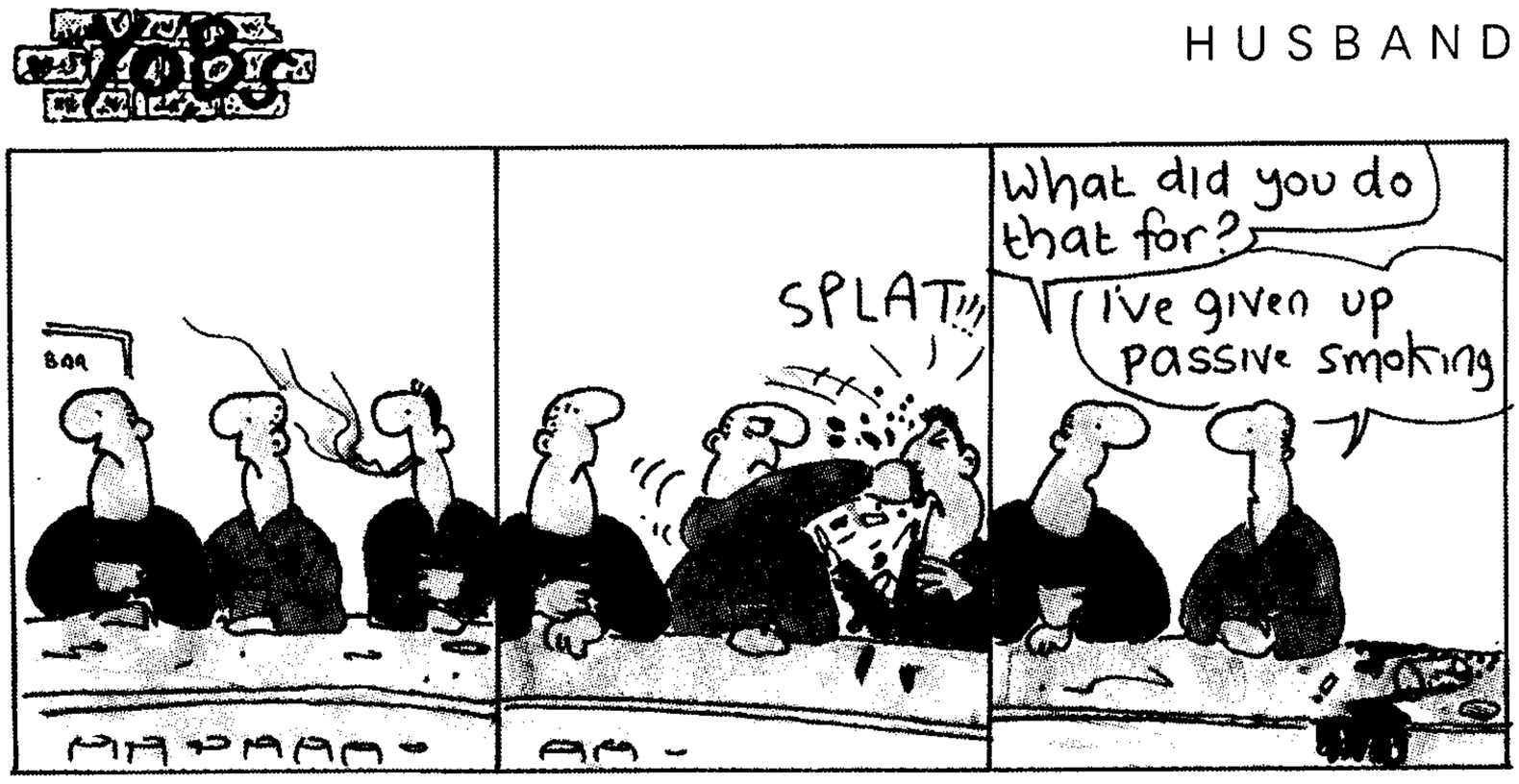
DOWN

1 What Wonderbras do for an order of gangsters (5,2,2)
2 That's like starting to accept Blair's U-turn, Chuck (5)
3 Ways into modern style surgery's *Guide on Taking Dumps* (8)
4 Wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am guy's typical sort of relationship? (2-3)
5 Mrs Thatcher-type Labour cut (6-3)
6 Kow-tows attributed to Kinnock, say (6)
7 Bloke as broad as nuisance Brenda (4,5)
8 Outside broadcast quits filthy location (5)
14 Shag Penny, heartlessly taking no precaution – a minor irritation (5,4)
15 Mad Ivy's course on erection fixation (2,3,4)
17 It's considered foul and raunchy section by turns (9)
18 Bishops against substituting male genitalia (8)
21 Member kept up bravely (6)
22 Prattle with energy about head from Lord Clark (5)
23 Roof worker got up, drunk again (5)
24 Crew upset over Brenda, the title-giver (5)

Crossword 228 winner: R.P.J. HOLDEN

ACROSS: 1 Veracious 6 Fussy 9 Rabbi 10 Bare truth 11 Ineptly 12 Nod Off 14 Aisle 15 Bald patch 17 Leg-puller 19 Local 21 Pay-off 23 Manatee 25 Tossed off 26 Slang 27 Rides 28 Skylarked.

DOWN: 1/13 Vertically challenged 2 Rubbers 3 Cointreau 4 Oh boy 5 Strangler 6 Feted 7 Snuff it 8 Yo-ho 15 Bullfrogs 16 Polynesia 18 Grassed 20 Cat-walk 22 Overs 23 Miffy 24 Stir.



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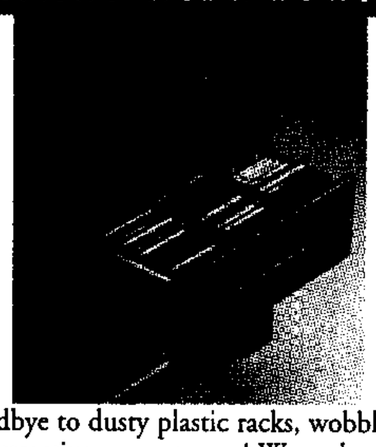

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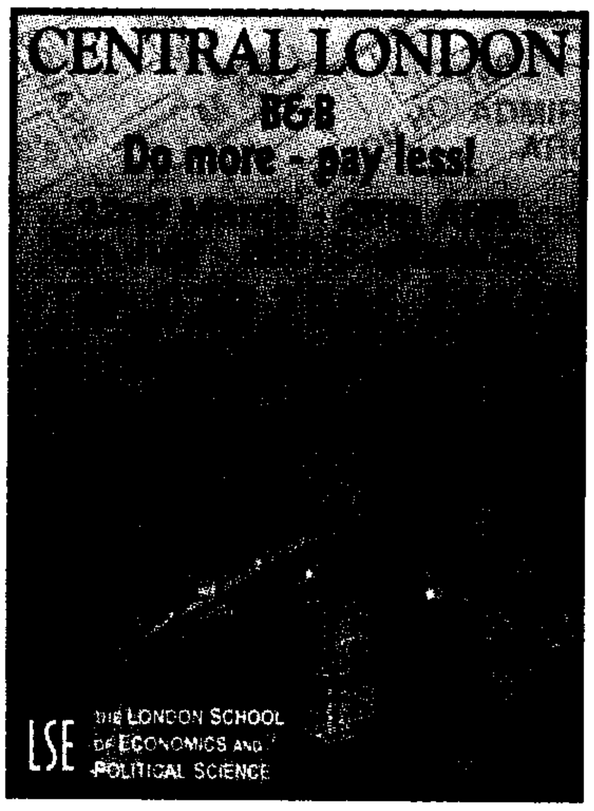

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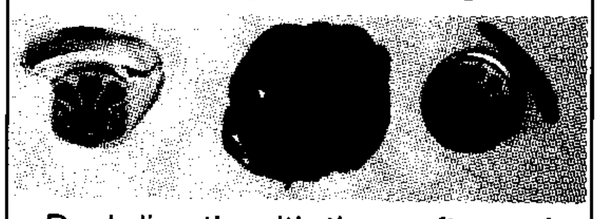

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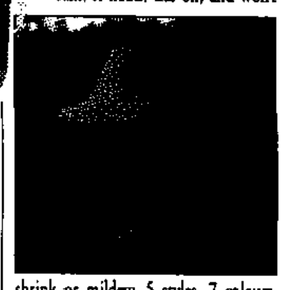

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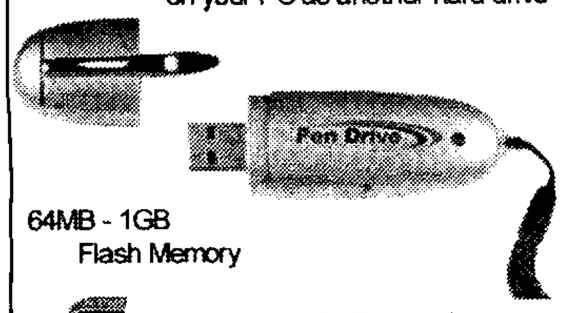

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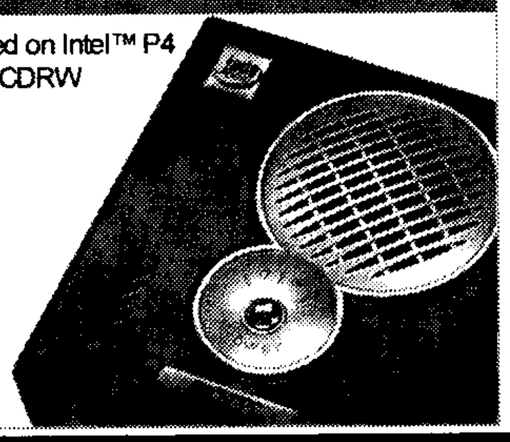

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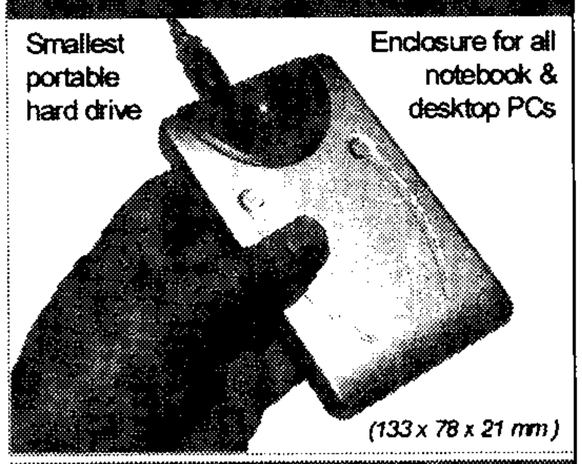

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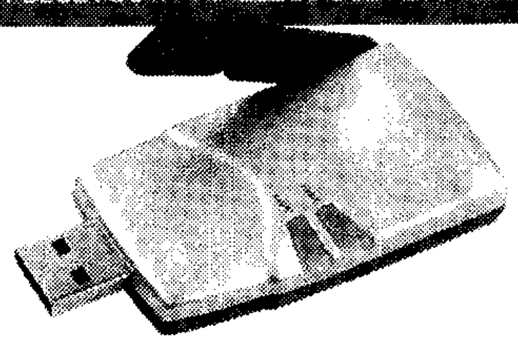

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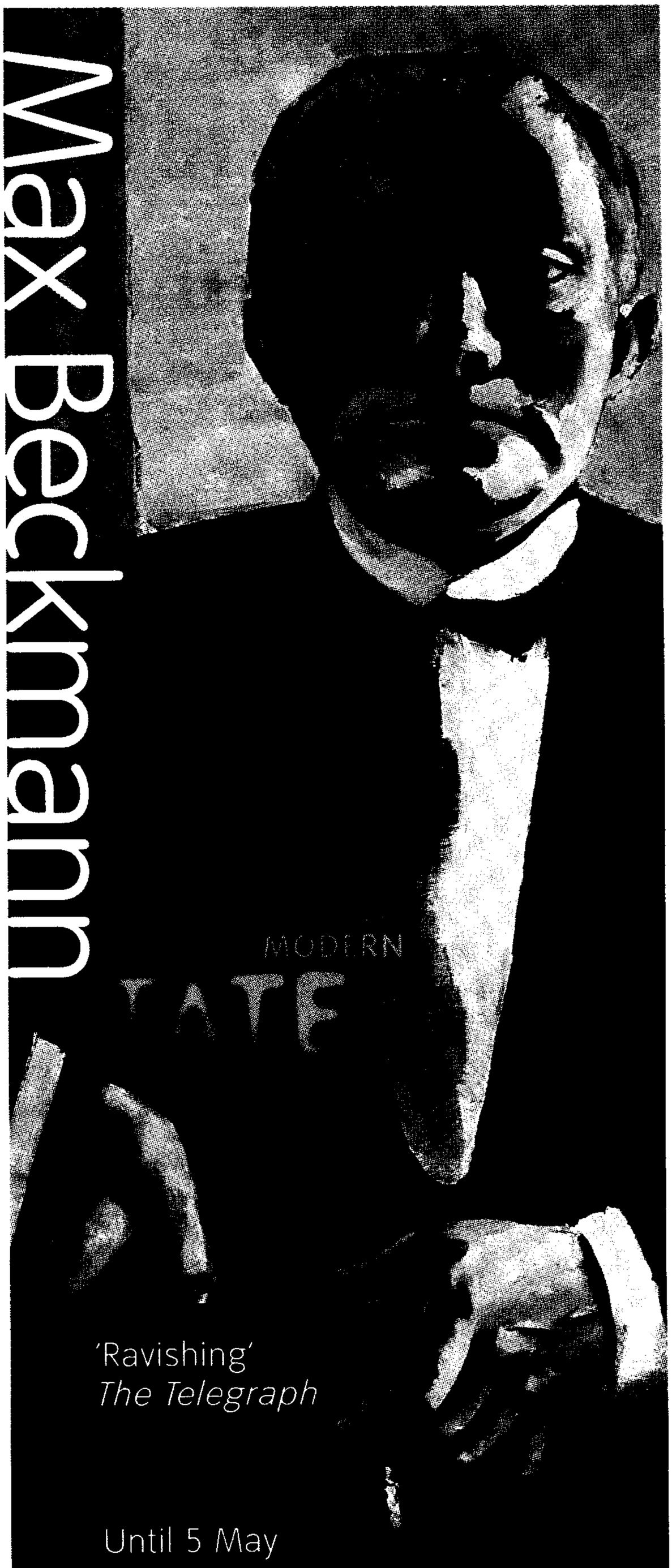

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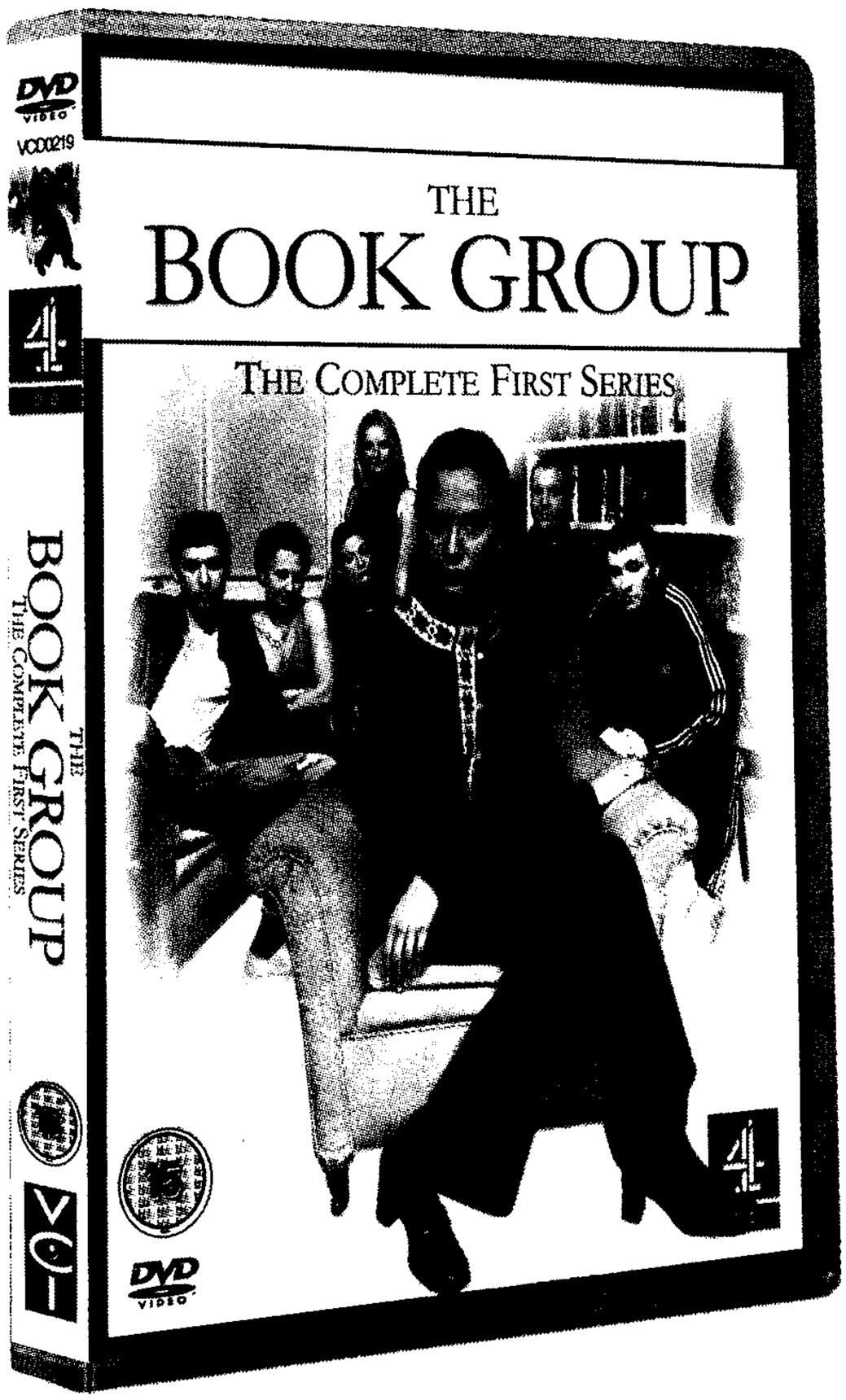

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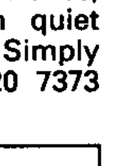

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CANON INKJETS

COLOUR INKJET RANGE

S200 720 x 2880 dpi, 5ppm mono, 3ppm colour, USB...**£34.99** (£41.11)

S520 1200 x 2400 dpi, 14ppm mono, 9ppm colour, USB...**£79.99** (£93.99)

S900 1200 x 2400 dpi photo printer, USB interface.....**£179.99** (£211.49)

BJC-85 portable printer, irda/USB/ parallel interface....**£99.99** (£117.49)

All printers are factory refurbished stock with a 1 year warranty. New mono & colour ink cartridges installed.

DELL PII 400MHz

EX-CORPORATE IMPORT

Intel PII 400MHz
CD-ROM drive
12GB hard drive
256MB RAM

With Intel Pentium II 400MHz chip, 256MB SDRAM, 12GB drive, internal CD-ROM, 13.3" TFT screen, 56K/LAN combo card. No op/sys or drivers, US keyboard layout (easy UK setup).

£369.99 EX **£434.74 Inc VAT**

CANON SCANNERS

GRADE A CANON REFURBS

USB Connection
Full 1 year RTB warranty

CanoScan 670U: 600 x 1200 dpi res, 42 Bit colour, flatbed design, z-lid.

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CanoScan 1240U: 2400 x 1200 dpi, 42 Bit colour, flatbed design, z-lid.

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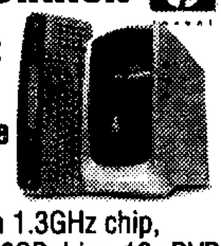
HP PAVILION 710

HP STOCK ROTATION

Celeron 1.3GHz
DVD & CD-RW
40GB hard drive
128MB RAM



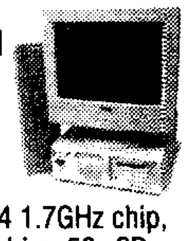
With Intel Celeron 1.3GHz chip, 128MB SDRAM, 40GB drive, 16x DVD, 16x 8x 40x CD-RW, Intel on-board graphics, 56K modem, Windows XP Home & Microsoft Works suite 2001.

£379.99 EX **£446.49 Inc VAT**

ELONEX P4 PACKAGE

1.7GHz PC & 17" MONITOR

256MB DDR RAM
40GB hard drive
56x CD-ROM
MS Windows XP



With Intel Pentium 4 1.7GHz chip, 256MB RAM, 40GB drive, 56x CD-ROM, built-in graphics & audio, 56K modem, MS Win XP Home, Elonex 17" monitor. As new - 1 year warranty.

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SUB £20 SCANNER

USB FLATBED SCANNER

A4 scan area
600 x 1200 dpi
32 Bit colour
Slimline design

Medion 9385 flatbed scanner, A4 sized scanning area, lightweight slimline design, 600 x 1200 dpi optical res, 32 Bit colour depth, USB connection to PC, plain boxed. Windows 98 req.

£19.99 EX **£23.49 Inc VAT**

COLOUR LASER

MINOLTA MAGICOLOR II

600 x 600 dpi
16 page/min
LAN interface
250 sheet tray

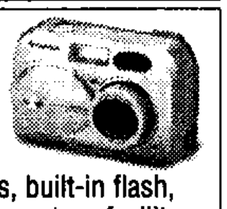
Windows laser printer, 600 x 600 dpi print res, 16 ppm mono/4 ppm colour, 8MB RAM (Max 64MB), 250 sheet paper capacity, parallel port & RJ-45 LAN connections. Lowest UK price!

£399.99 EX **£469.99 Inc VAT**

FUJI FINEPIX 2600

FUJI FP2600

2 Megapixel
3x optical zoom



1200 x 1600 dpi res, built-in flash, TFT screen & video capture facility. Grade A Fuji refurb - 1 year warranty.

£129.99 EX **£152.74 Inc VAT**

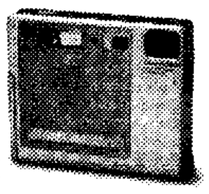
FP2800: 2 Megapixel, 6x optical zoom lens. As new Fuji refurb - 1 year wty.

£169.99 EX **£199.74 Inc VAT**

MINOLTA DIMAGE X

POCKET SIZED DESIGN

2 Megapixel
3x optical zoom
Weighs 135g
Only 20mm thick



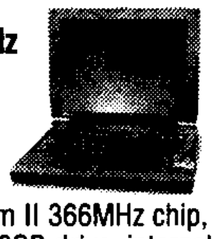
Ultra compact 2 Megapixel camera, 1600 x 1200 dpi resolution, 3x optical zoom lens, rapid startup time, movie record facility, includes 32MB SD card. Minolta Grade B stock - 6 month wty.

£214.99 EX **£252.61 Inc VAT**

DELL PII 366MHz

EX-CORPORATE IMPORT

Intel PII 366MHz
CD-ROM drive
6GB hard drive
128MB RAM



With Intel Pentium II 366MHz chip, 128MB SDRAM, 6GB drive, internal CD-ROM, 13.3" TFT screen, 56K/LAN combo card. No op/sys or drivers, US keyboard layout (easy UK setup).

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FUJI FINEPIX A101

FUJI A101

1.3 Megapixel
Digital telephoto

1280 x 960 dpi res, built-in flash, macro mode & video capture facility. Grade A Fuji refurb - 1 year warranty.

£59.99 EX **£70.49 Inc VAT**

A202: 2 Megapixel, autoflash, TFT screen. As new Fuji refurb - 1 year wty.

£89.99 EX **£105.74 Inc VAT**

HP PAVILION 420

HP STOCK ROTATION

Celeron 1.2GHz
DVD-ROM drive
20GB hard drive
128MB SDRAM

With Intel Celeron 1.2GHz processor, 128MB SDRAM, 20GB hard drive, 16x DVD-ROM drive, on-board graphics & audio, 56K modem, MS Windows XP Home Edition & MS Works 2001.

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6 PIECE SPEAKER SET

5.1 compatible
65W output
Ideal for DVDs
Integrated amp

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COLOUR INKJET RANGE

Z45 1200 x 2400 dpi, 15ppm max, USB interface.....**£39.99** (£46.99)

Z55 1200 x 3600 dpi, 17ppm, USB & parallel interface....**£59.99** (£70.49)

Z65 1200 x 4800 dpi, 21ppm max, USB interface.....**£69.99** (£82.24)

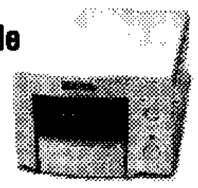
X83 New version of the X73 - now prints at 12ppm.....**£79.99** (£93.99)

All printers are factory refurbished stock with a 3 month warranty. Ink carts included - ink life not guaranteed.

USB FILM SCANNER

£100 OFF MARKET PRICE!

Negative & slide scanning
2820 dpi res
USB interface



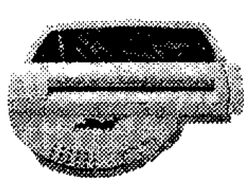
Minolta Dimâge Scan Dual II film scanner, scans 35mm negs/slides, 2820 dpi scanning res, 36 Bit colour depth. Retail boxed - Inc USB cable, drivers & Photoshop LE software.

£199.99 EX **£234.88 Inc VAT**

DOCUMENT SHREDDER

PAPERMONSTER JUNIOR

A4 sized input
Auto feed
4 mm shred
Inc waste bin



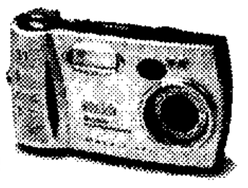
Papermonster Junior - personal shredder, A4 sized input, shreds up to 3 sheets at a time, 4 mm shred size - ideal for document security/protection, inc waste bin - 13L paper capacity.

£19.99 EX **£23.49 Inc VAT**

KODAK DX-3900

3.1 MEGAPIXEL CAMERA

6x zoom
TFT screen
Macro mode
USB interface



Kodak 3.1 Megapixel digital camera, max 2160 x1440 pixel resolution, 2x optical zoom - 3x digital zoom, automatic flash, optical viewfinder, TFT screen, CompactFlash card inc.

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FUJI DIGITAL CAMERAS

FUJI FINEPIX MODELS

2200 2 Megapixel, 2.5x digital zoom, TFT screen.....**£69.99** (£82.24)

4800 4.3 Megapixel Super CCD, 3x optical zoom.....**£229.99** (£270.24)

6800 6 Megapixel Super CCD, 3x optical zoom.....**£279.99** (£328.99)

601 6 Megapixel Super CCD, 3x zoom, USB cradle.....**£299.99** (£352.49)

All units are factory refurbished by Fuji themselves to an excellent standard, with a 1 year Fuji warranty.

18 PAGE/MIN LASER

MINOLTA PAGEPRO 18L

Up to 18 ppm
600 x 600 dpi
250 sheet tray
2MB RAM

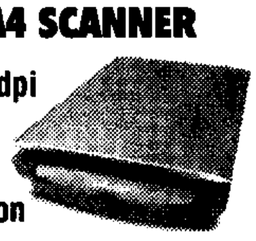
PagePro 18L mono laser, 1200 dpi class printing, maximum 18 ppm output, 250 sheet paper input tray, 2MB RAM (max 18MB), hostbased PostScript level 2, parallel interface.

£129.99 EX **£152.74 Inc VAT**

CANON D1230U

HIGH RES A4 SCANNER

1200 x 2400 dpi
A4 scan area
48 Bit colour
USB connection



High quality A4 colour flatbed scanner, 1200 x 2400 dpi optical resolution, 48 bit internal colour depth, one touch scanning button, USB connection to PC for easy installation. Retail boxed.

£49.99 EX **£58.74 Inc VAT**

HP PAVILION 421

HP STOCK ROTATION

Celeron 1.3GHz
CD-RW drive
20GB hard drive
128MB SDRAM

With Intel Celeron 1.3GHz processor, 128MB SDRAM, 20GB hard drive, 24x 10x 40x CD-RW, on-board graphics & audio, 56K modem, MS Windows XP Home Edition & MS Works 2002.

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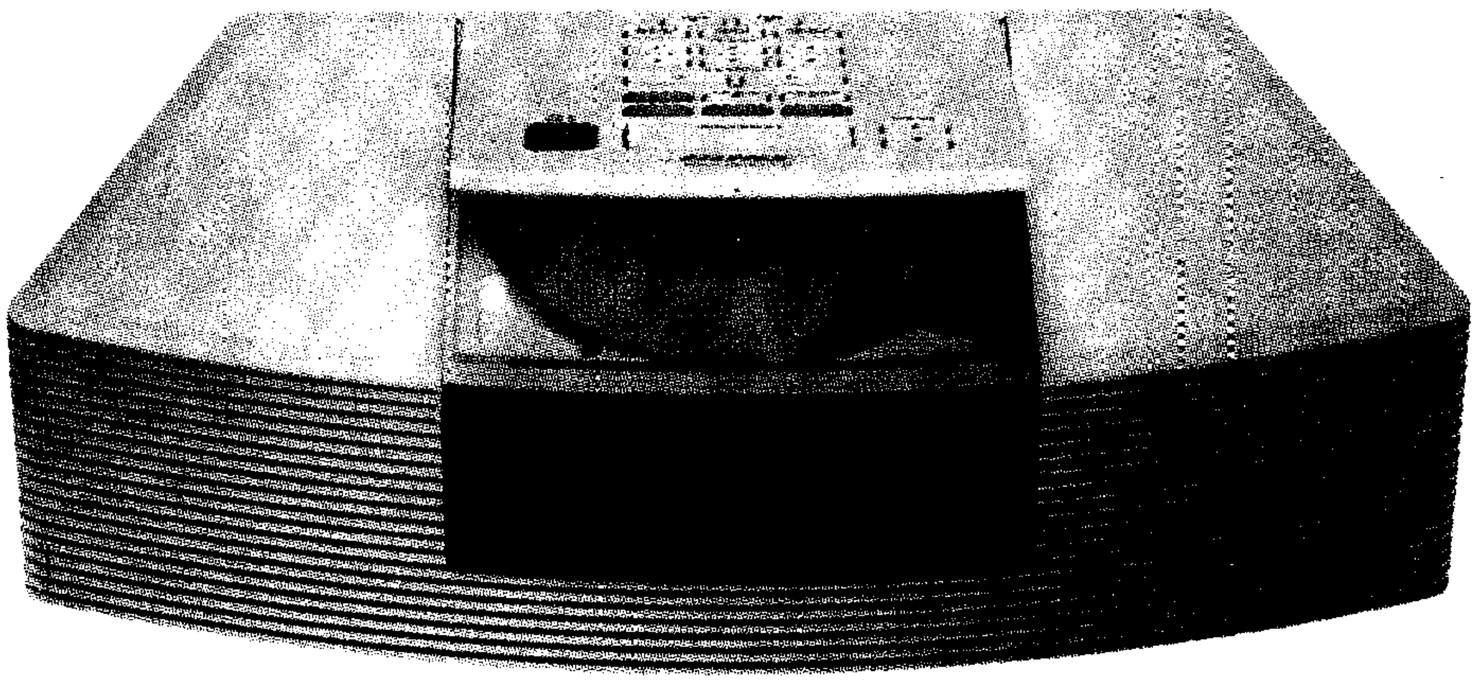

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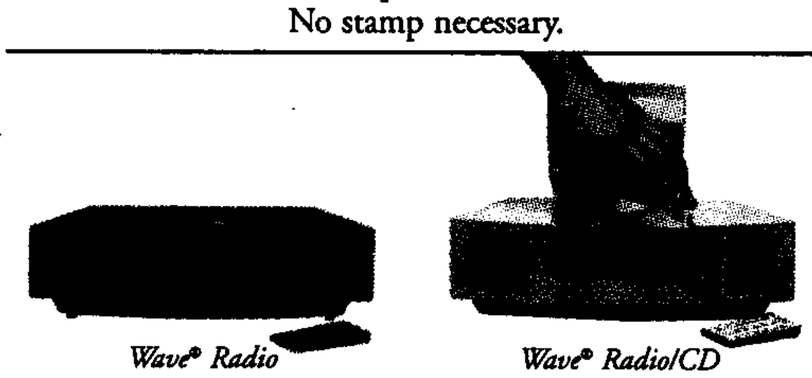

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